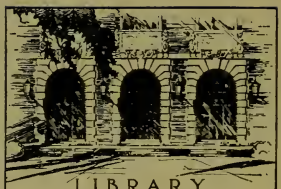

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PENHALA.

VOL. III.

PENHALA:

A WAYSIDE WIZARD.

BY

CLARA LEMORE,

AUTHOR OF

'A HARVEST OF WEEDS,' 'A COVENANT WITH THE DEAD,'
'GWEN DALE'S ORDEAL,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK III.

(CONTINUED.)

PENHALA.

CHAPTER V.

THE LINES CONVERGE.

When Ellaline's messenger came back with the basket from Tregarron Head, he brought a tiny note from Mary.

'I am so glad you did not come near this poor fellow,' it ran; 'I am afraid he is in for a touch of fever, and, though I have no fear for myself, I think it is better and safer, for many reasons, that I should hold no further communication

with any of you, until the question of infection is put beyond all doubt.'

She wound up with a request that Ellaline would have a bag packed for her —just a pair of slippers and some brushes, and so forth; she had already ordered up from the town a few household necessaries.

Ellaline's face was very long when she took this note to her father and Lady Glenhaggart, but they pooh-poohed her fears—Lady Glenhaggart with a calm indifference which suggested that she found it impossible to get up any real interest in the whims and fancies of a person so far her social inferior; Mr. Penhala with a good-natured assurance that Mrs. Smith was a lady who might be trusted to do the right thing, under any and every circumstance whatever.

'She'll come home none the worse for her kindness, and a couple of days' rest will set her up as fresh as a daisy again, my dear,' he said, cheerily; 'and if those poor souls really need her so badly, we must make up our minds to get along the best way we can without her, that's all. But we shall miss her terribly all the same.'

A sentiment which Ellaline echoed heartily.

If Penhala's mind had not been so much taken up with other matters just then, he would certainly have enquired more particularly into this whim of Mrs. Smith's; but with a large party of guests on his hands, and his head busy with plans for Ellaline's future happiness, it is not surprising that he had very little thought to spare for other matters. And when his mind

was not occupied with either of these subjects, it always went back to one other—his son John.

When he consented to this visit to Carn Ruth, he had hoped that all that old misery was left too far behind in the long ago, to trouble him to any great extent; but he found it was not so. The place was clogged with saddest, bitterest memories of the boy he had so idolised; and he found himself wishing a dozen times a day that he had not allowed himself to be persuaded into revisiting a spot so pregnant to him of death and disappointment.

It was under the influence of this feeling that he formed the idea of handing the estate over to Ellaline on her marriage. Pinto must be persuaded into taking the name of Penhala, and Penhala's House, and the park surrounding it, should be

Penhala's wedding-present to his adopted daughter. After all, it would only be anticipating matters by a few years, and since he could not enjoy the beautiful place himself, why should not they?

In settling things thus, he was taking it for granted that Lady Glenhaggart would not back out of the engagement when she heard that Ellaline was not really his daughter. But upon that point he did not worry himself much. Nobody but Lady Glenhaggart herself need know the real facts concerning Ellaline's birth—even Fitz himself might be kept in ignorance of the truth, if her ladyship desired it.

And her ladyship did desire it, for the present at all events.

'Of course they must both know ultimately,' she said, when Penhala put the point to her.

The discovery that Ellaline was not a Penhala was a ghastly blow to her, and it needed all the counteracting influences of her present surroundings to reconcile her to the discovery. Perhaps if Penhala had made his announcement before she had seen this beautiful house of his, she would have drawn back in spite of the money. She had always set her heart on Fitzwarrene marrying for station. But then the possession of such a place as this, must of itself confer a certain amount of distinction on the owner, and, for the rest, who among those whose opinion she cared about, was ever likely to hear this hole-and-corner mystery concerning Ellaline's birth. She had always been accepted as Lancelot Penhala's daughter by his second wife, what was to start people off on the track of the truth now? And right down

at the bottom of her mean, shabby mind there may have been another argument at work, reconciling her to Ellaline's lack of birth and breeding—this disadvantage of birth, might it not give her a little power over the girl if such a thing were needed at any time? For her ladyship had already found out that the pretty child could be remarkably self-willed upon occasion, and it was quite possible to imagine a state of affairs, in which a lever of this kind might enable the mother-in-law to maintain her supremacy. So her ladyship swallowed her consternation as gracefully as she could, and diplomatised skilfully for her own ends.

'Of course they must know ultimately,' she said, 'but I don't think that just now would be the best time to tell them. They would be sure to talk it over between

themselves, and secrets of that kind are dangerous things to discuss in a house full of visitors. We will choose an opportunity later on.'

And Penhala felt bound to leave the matter in her hands, though he would have preferred that Fitz at least should know the whole truth without delay. And yet, when all was said and done, it seemed cruel to let such worldly considerations dim the glory of their love-dream, on the very first day of its accomplishment; time enough for practical discussions when the first rapture of knowing that they belonged to one another was over; they would never, in this world at all events, get so near to the attainment of perfect happiness again; let them enjoy it as long as they could; prudence and the rest of the precious sisterhood could wait.

And to do Fitz justice he showed every disposition to avail himself of the privileges of his position. He even went the length, on that first evening of his engagement, of leaving the dining-room five minutes after the exodus of the ladies, and went strolling along the terrace past the open drawing-room windows.

But as long as he was within view from the windows, he was careful to carry himself as if he had come that way quite by accident. A disinterested observer would have sworn he was intent upon admiring the sunset over the sea; but it happened that there were no disinterested observers at hand at the time: everybody in the house knew the exact state of affairs between their host's daughter and Fitz Pinto, and an intelligent smile passed from lip to lip as the young man strolled by with

that magnificent air of unconsciousness.

The Baronne de Vieuxbas, a gay, amiable little Frenchwoman, one of Lady Glenhaggart's friends, was talking with Ellaline at the time, but when she saw Fitz pass the window, she, too, was seized with a sudden desire to watch the sunset from the terrace; and nothing would please her but that Ellaline should accompany her. Fitz came strolling back and found them there; and then he reminded them that there were chairs a little farther along. La Baronne got up 'just to pluck a rose from the wall behind her—they were not to move;' and then suddenly there was no Baronne nor any other creature in the wide world but their two selves, and the terrace overhanging the little fishing harbour was a

garden of Eden, tenanted by another Adam and Eve before the fall.

The Baronne looked a little unlike herself when she got back to the drawing-room, and the lamps and the fashionable ladies; for she had glanced behind her at those foolish young people as she stepped in through the window, and the sight of those two heads, bent so close to one another, had reminded her of an incident in her own girlhood, and of the *esclandre* that had followed upon it; the knowledge came upon her with a shock of pain that she would have been a far better woman than she was if that little incident had been allowed to work itself out to its own natural completion, in the fashion that held good here, among these English people.

The afterglow was quite gone, and the evening star was already scintillating against a background of steel-blue sky, when Ellaline remembered she had duties to perform to her father's guests. She would not let Fitz enter the room with her—she would go in alone, she said, and he could find his way in by some other entrance.

So he stood and watched her run up the terrace in the direction of the lighted windows, and then, just before she reached them, he saw her stop and turn towards him so suddenly that he guessed something was wrong, and ran to meet her.

'There is a man there,' she gasped, breathless with her run and the sudden scare. 'He is crouching down between the buttress and the stone vase, looking in the drawing-room window.'

'All right!' said Fitz, squeezing her hands re-assuringly. 'Don't get frightened—we'll soon have him out, and find out his business. Where did you say?'

But there was no need for further explanation from her, for the cause of her fright, perhaps knowing himself discovered, stepped out from the recess that had concealed him and faced them, waiting their approach. As they came they saw him clearly outlined against the luminous twilight of the June night—a tall, broad-built fellow, with a mass of wavy hair falling from under his limp felt hat to his shoulders, and a thick beard reaching half-way down his vest.

'What the dickens are you up to, sir,' began Fitz the impetuous, as they drew near one another, 'lurking about the place

after dark, and frightening people out of their lives in this fashion? What's your business? Do you know you're trespassing?'

The trespasser uncovered, and bent his head in Ellaline's direction.

'I am sorry if I startled the lady,' he said, in a low, still voice, which had a curious stir of emotion in its tone for all its quietness. 'I am a stranger in this part of the world, and I've lost my way. I came up the steps over the cliff from the beach below, and missed my path back to the high road. Seeing the lighted windows, I made for them, meaning to ask my way. But you will understand why I hesitated when I saw the style of company inside there. Perhaps you would be kind enough to direct me to the servants' entrance.'

'Oh, Fitz,' said Ellaline, under her breath, with her clear, bright eyes fixed steadily on the intruder's face, 'it is the man we saw at Epsom last week—I am sure of it! The man who did the tricks with the cards.'

'By Jove! so it is!' cried Fitz, mightily astonished, though he could hardly have told why. 'What brings you down to this out-of-the-way corner of the world, Sir Wizard?'

'The young lady has keen eyes,' said the wizard, with a slight smile at Ellaline, a smile which seemed to say that he was gratified by her recollection of him. And instinctively Ellaline smiled back at him, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to find herself chatting easily with gentlemen of his social standing—she had quite forgotten her fright of a moment ago

in this recognition of an old acquaintance. 'I certainly was at Epsom last week, and I am as certainly in Cornwall this. As for what brings me here—I might with equal reason put the same question to you, sir, only—I do not.'

Fitz laughed in frankest self-accusation.

'I offer you my best apologies,' he said, with a little bow, ironical but wholly good-humoured. 'It certainly is no business of mine. I'll take you round to the front of the house and set you in your right road again. Come on!'

'I wonder,' said Ellaline, and at the first sound of her voice both the men stopped and turned to her; Fitz handsome and happy, and the personification of masculine elegance, in the absolute faultlessness of his dress and the easy indifference of his bearing; the other shabby to the

verge of destitution, and with a curious blending of caution and recklessness showing itself in the lines of his face and the tones of his voice; a vagabond all over. And yet, as they both turned at Ellaline's voice to listen to what she had to say, a curious fancy smote her that this shabby, dusty wayfarer was as truly a gentleman as the perfectly-appointed youth at his side. It was one of those little touches of instinctive knowledge which come at times to all of us; come so clearly and unmistakably, in spite of their apparent lack of all foundation, as to make the more thoughtful ask if we have not after all left out of the accepted list of the senses this —the most reliable and the least open to deception of them all—the sense of Instinct.

'I wonder,' said Ellaline, and then, meet-

ing their glances of courteous attention, stopped, afraid she was going to take a liberty. 'I was going to say,' she went on, with a charming little touch of timidity in her manner, 'that I wondered if you would perform some of your tricks for us, now, in the drawing-room. It would pass half-an-hour most delightfully, and if you were not in a hurry——'

He laughed a little as she paused, one of the strangest laughs you ever heard; there was amusement in it certainly, but there was suffering too, and, behind both these, a touch of dare-devilment.

'No,' he said, grave and courteous again in an instant—'no, I am in no hurry. I shall be very proud to give my exhibition of magic before such a select audience; and glad to earn the wherewithal to pay for a supper into the bargain.'

Ellaline shrank back a little at that, but with surprised pity only.

'Does the fact of my being hungry astonish you?' he said, with a smile that matched his laugh of a moment ago. 'Well, I confess that things don't often get played so low down as that with me. But I have had to spend a lot of money this last day or two, and there is not much of a fortune to be picked up, in the way of chance coppers, in the little town under the cliff there. So I admit that your offer of a pitch in the drawing-room of Penhala's house is a boon to me, little lady.'

Her heart was yearning to give him into Parson's charge, with orders to supply him with a good supper before he began his performance; but that instinct stepped in again and checked the im-

pulse. She did not like to suggest that he should sup in the servants'-hall, and she did not like to offer him payment before he had earned it.

But when he stood revealed in the lamplight of the drawing-room, taking up his post in the recess of the big bay, with the double windows wide open behind him, his face and figure thrown into vivid relief against the purple background of the summer night, she almost repented her of her overstrained delicacy. He must surely be almost fainting with hunger, she thought, to give his face such a white, strained, rigid look as it wore all through his performance.

As for the entertainment, like most unstudied effects, it was a huge success.

Just as the ladies had grouped themselves in a compact cluster half way down

the room, the gentlemen came in from the dining-room ; and after a volley of surprised enquiry, they, in turn, grouped themselves to the rear of the ladies, and left Monsieur le Prestidigitateur, as la Baronne called him, a fair field in which to work his wonders.

Lance Penhala leant by the framework of the open door, so that there was the whole length of the large room between him and the conjurer. It seemed to him all of a piece with his return home, and the vivid memories of the past which that return had brought to the surface again, that this man should turn up in this haphazard manner, and give a show of legerdemain in that very room where, in the dead and gone past, John had so often done the same thing. He caught Paul watching him once during the entertain-

ment, and knew he must be thinking the same thing; although after that one glance the young man's face became as self-contained and inscrutable as ever. But they were the only two people in the room who knew of any reason why this exhibition of the wayside wizard's art should be unpalatable in that place; everybody else was, or pretended to be, enchanted with the little diversion.

'And the man himself is really not the worst part of the display,' said Lady Glenhaggart, fanning herself slowly, and speaking without caring in the least whether the subject of her remarks heard them or not. 'A thoroughly picturesque vagabond from top to toe, and a good-looking face into the bargain.'

'I think his face is more than good-looking,' returned the lady she was speak-

ing to—a Mrs. Wentworth, one of her married step-daughters—'it is interesting, striking, almost distinguished. I wonder what his history is—something out of the way, I know. I should like to see the shape of his chin and jaw. A beard flatters some men so tremendously. I expect there's a falling off in the lower half of the face; if it were as good all through as the part we can see, he wouldn't be here to-night, amusing us with card-tricks, on the chance of picking up a few shillings for his trouble.'

'Lucy is off on her hobby,' said Fitz, who, with Ellaline, was just behind. 'She is never so happy as when she is reckoning somebody up. If we don't keep an eye on our Professor of Magic, Ella, she will get hold of him and shave him, to find out the shape of his jaw.'

'Imbecile!' murmured Lucy, with a good-humoured glance over her shoulder. 'Here is a little piece of information for you, Mr. Scatterbrain—when you are married, don't attempt to impose too far on your wife's good-nature, or——'

But Fitz gagged her skilfully with his handkerchief, and threatened her with untold horrors if she dared to venture another word on that subject. And Ellaline laughingly ran away, and took up her stand next to Paul, who was alone, as usual, by the mantel-piece, and began to tell him how she had found the wizard hiding on the terrace, and peeping in at the open window.

And his manner as he listened astonished her very much indeed. If she had not known that the idea was perfectly preposterous, she might have thought he

was frightened. But, then, how or why should Paul be frightened of this poor, hungry, wandering wizard? she asked herself, and laughed at her own fancifulness by way of answer. And the terror, or surprise, or whatever it was that had flashed into his uplifted eyes, was gone again before she had time to analyse it, so that she was altogether a little mystified for the moment.

And she was to be a very much older woman, in many ways, before she found out the meaning of Paul Petrovsky's terror that night.

'Hungry, do you say he is?' he asked, when she had finished her pitiful little account. 'I'm inclined to think it is a got-up affair from beginning to end. Pinto should have persuaded you out of inviting the fellow in. How do we know

what his purpose is? Perhaps, at this very moment, he is reckoning up the value of the jewellery in the room, and wondering how he can find out which is Lady Glenhaggart's dressing-room, and how much he could get for the diamonds in her ears. My dear little Ella, don't look at me in such unspeakable indignation; I won't breathe another word against your *protegé*. I'll even carry my friendship for the gentleman farther than that—When he has finished his hocus-pocus business, I'll take him round to some quiet corner in the offices and see that he has a good supper. And you must not be angry with me, if I say that I'll also see him safely off the premises afterwards.'

But Ellaline was too grateful to be angry, for by this time she was certain that the handsome strolling conjurer was

faint for want of food, and she had been puzzling her tender heart how to procure him a supper in the house, without submitting him to the ordeal of receiving charity at the hands of the servants.

When the performance was over Fitz took the man in hand, and disappeared with him through the window. But they had not reached the end of the terrace before Petrovsky overtook them, and offered to become responsible for the safe conduct of the stranger; and Fitz, nothing loth, yielded up his charge and returned to the drawing-room.

The other two held on their way, silently. Just here, on the south-western front of the house, it was as dark as it was likely to be all night; but as they reached the corner of the house they came into the light of the moon, just rising over the

plantations. The terrace ended here, and in pointing out the steps to his companion Petrovsky faced round to him, in a way that had some little touch of peculiarity in it, and flashed both his hands upwards through the air, very much in the manner of one warding off an unexpected blow.

The conjurer did not appear to notice either movement, and Paul turned again and walked on, with a touch of perplexed doubt on his brow.

'My cousin,' he said, 'the young lady whom you startled so unpardonably on the terrace, asked me to do the hospitalities of the house to you. She said business had not been good with you down here, and she thought, if I asked you to have some supper, you would very likely accept the invitation.'

'The young lady is just an angel,' answered the other jauntily.

Now that he was alone with a man, it was curious to mark the change in his manner. The instinct of the gentleman, so quickly aroused in the presence of Ellaline's fresh sweetness and beauty, had slipped into its usual place in the background, and, except for a certain refinement of speech, there was nothing in his present manner to differentiate him from any other member of the vagabond class.

'Just an angel,' he repeated; 'and her eyes are almost as good to see with as they are to look at.'

'Which means that she was right about the supper?'

'You've hit it, governor.'

'Come along then! We'll go round to

the steward's office and get them to send us up some beef and pickles.'

The conjurer burst out laughing—a loud, boisterous burst of laughter it was, so sudden and so *apropos* of nothing, that Petrovsky's hand went instinctively to the opening of his vest, and closed round something that lay hidden there; as if he recognised a danger signal in that unnatural burst of laughter, and would be on his guard.

'I beg your pardon, governor,' said the conjurer, stopping his laugh dead in the middle as abruptly as he had started it. 'It's not the best manners in the world to burst out laughing without explaining why; but I was tickled at something in my own thoughts. The beef and pickles, by all means, sir, and in the steward's parlour—as you suggested. And if the butler

would add a pint of his famous brown October—why, so much the better.'

Petrovsky answered nothing. The touch of reckless audacity in his companion's manner strengthened his previous suspicion of the man's mission at Carn Ruth. As they moved along side by side, he kept a close watch from under his lowered lids on the other's every movement, and he carried his hand in his vest till they were in the steward's parlour, with the lamp lit and the table between them.

The conjurer's little burst of audacious mirth was all over and done with by then; he was looking as utterly fagged and worn out as he had looked awhile ago, standing in the big window recess at the end of the drawing-room, with the purple of the night sky behind him. But presently, when the butler addressed the Russian by name,

his weary apathy broke up for a moment, and in its place there came a flash of surprise, of enlightenment rather, which Paul saw, and thought he understood. The glance was almost one of recognition. Petrovsky met it without flinching. Thinking what he thought of the man's mission at Carn Ruth, his next observation showed the possession of considerable nerve.

'Yes,' he said, when the door had closed behind the butler again, 'Petrovsky is my name; what's yours?'

'Tom Jones,' returned the other, promptly.

'Well, then—Tom Jones, we will say—what object had you in view when you were peeping and prying outside there on the terrace just now?'

'What do you think?'

'Never mind what I think, I want you to tell me.'

'Seems to me,' said Tom Jones, getting up from his chair by the table—to bring himself the nearer to the level of the man on the hearthrug, as it seemed, or perhaps it was to get his own face away from the strong light of the lamp—'seems to me, governor, that you've got some queer notion in your head, concerning my unfortunate little act of trespass on that terrace this evening. It was a simple case of a chap in a strange country going astray, I do assure you. I'm neither a professional burglar taking notes of the plan of the house, nor an outcast relation of any of the upper-crust yonder, come to threaten 'em with a show-up unless they pay me to clear out, and hold my tongue. I'm just what

you see me—a poor devil who's been down on his luck this many long year past, and means harm to nobody as long as nobody harms him.'

On the surface of it there was nothing in this speech of an agitating nature, and yet it did agitate Paul Petrovsky to a curious extent. The entrance of the man with the supper-tray drew off Tom Jones' attention at the moment, or he would certainly have wondered to see the sudden illumination that lit up the Russian's still face, and the sudden tremor that seized on him.

A stupendous plan had leapt, fully matured, into his brain. If this man's account of himself were true, why should he not serve Paul's end as well as another?

But just then Tom Jones' attention was centered on the food; whatever else about him was false or assumed, his hunger was

genuine enough. During the next ten minutes he scarcely glanced at the white still face in the big arm-chair by the fireplace; and, in turn, the white still face never ceased to watch him. But now there was a new purpose in this silent watchfulness; it wore an air of keenest investigation; as if the watcher sought to discover the innermost nature of this hungry fellow, to find out on which side of him lay his weakest point, in which direction he was most vulnerable to an attack from without. So one watched and the other ate, each equally silent, each equally busy.

CHAPTER VI.

A BARGAIN—PETROVSKY'S HALF.

'ARE you often as hungry as that?' asked Paul presently, after that long silence, of activity on the one hand and observation on the other. 'It must be worth while going through a good deal for ten minutes of such genuine enjoyment.'

Tom Jones laughed gently. His stomach was no longer empty, and being always the creature of his moods and impulses, his blackguardism was consequently less rampant for the time being.

'All the same, hunger is an acquaintance whose frequent visits soon become monotonous,' he answered, and helped himself to some cheese.

And Paul, watching, saw that he took a clean knife instead of the one he already had in use, and gave a thought to the story of the fugitive prince, who wiped his beard before he drank.

'What brought you down to this?' he asked, abruptly. 'One doesn't need to be as keen as a fox, to see that you've come a very long way down from your original standing. You've made a pretty mess of matters somehow, eh?'

'Yes,' replied Tom Jones; 'I've come a regular mucker, there's no mistake about that! But it's so long ago now, that as often as not I forget all about it.'

Paul took another look at his handsome

brown eyes—handsome still, for all the tracery of lines about them—and the delicate curve of his brows, and the sensitive arch of his nostrils, and then made a guess.

'A woman, was it?'

'Ay, the final cause was a woman—though, for the matter of that, so was the first.'

'Put all your eggs into one basket, eh?' said Paul, pithily.

'All I'd got left—yes. It wasn't much to boast of, that last lot, but it was all I'd got—my last rag of respectability, my last hope of going a bit straight, my last scrap of belief in anything good or holy under God's sun—but they all went into the one basket, and—it wouldn't hold 'em—too frail—it burst—and the eggs went to almighty smash.'

Paul watched him finish his last piece of cheese—he was eating daintily now, taking time to enjoy the toothsome morsels, instead of thinking only of filling a yawning vacuum down below—before he spoke again.

'When all's said and done, it must be a poor sort of existence—this wandering up and down the face of the country.'

'Poor? God! if you could know what it's like sometimes! But there, I'm not going to begin the whining dodge. It's fair wage for work done, you see, and that's the end of it.'

'Still, it seems strange to me, that a man like you—a man who has had a decent bringing-up, at all events—should be content to stay down there, at the very bottom of the ladder.'

'Content?' With a grim lifting of the

fine brows. 'That's a queer word to apply to me.'

'Well then, if you're not content, why stay there?'

Tom Jones' fingers stopped their nervous fiddling at the crumbs on the cloth, and his hand gradually closed up tight, till the knuckles stood out white and shiny under the strained skin. Then he lifted the clenched hand and struck the table a quick, passionate blow, as if the agony inside him must needs find an outlet somehow.

'Why do the damned stay in hell? Answer me that!' he muttered, hoarsely.

'Then you would get out if you could?'

'Pooh! what's the use of talking?' He got up and reached across the table for his cap, and turned as if to go.

But Paul rose too, and signed to him not to be so hasty.

'What would you do if you had five hundred pounds?' he asked, quietly.

The other fell back a step, as if the words had been a blow; and then, gathering some shred of credibility from the look on the other's face, he drew a big breath.

'Do?' he said. 'Do? Get out of the country as fast as I could.'

The words came with a rush, and left him still and wide-eyed, waiting for more.

'And what would you do *for* five hundred pounds?'

'Ah! You told the wages first—the work comes afterwards. That means that you know the work would be declined unless the workman had been first dazzled by the wages. It's something discreditable you want me to do; that's certain. Per-

haps it's even something criminal. No?' Paul had shaken his head. 'Well, there's very few things I wouldn't do for five hundred pounds, so out with it!'

'I want you to help me to set a great wrong right.' Tom Jones laughed in his throat. 'Yes, by the Cause I serve, I swear to you that, first and foremost, that is so! An old man in his dotage is striving to do his lawful heir out of his inheritance. I want your help to prevent this injustice. There are other motives, I admit; but this is one, and a genuine one, and, in view of the price I am willing to pay, it ought to be enough for you.'

A new quietness fell swiftly on the dusty vagabond by the table; this time not the quietness of inanition, but the stillness of muscle which often accompanies concen-

trated activity of the brain. His eye was steady and clear as he put his next question.

'You will tell me who the people are for whom I am going to work?'

'When you have undertaken to do what I want, and pledged yourself to secrecy. Though indeed your own self-interest will be your best pledge for that.'

'And there is no risk to me—no personal risk?'

'None whatever.'

'And you will pay me the five hundred down, for some particular job—some definite task that you set me to do—you will pay me the money when it is done, and leave me free to go my way?'

'You are longer in the head than I thought,' said Petrovsky, with the reflec-

tion of a mental smile in his eyes. 'Let me think a moment before I answer that question.'

He turned away and crossed over to the window, and stood there a few seconds staring out into the empty courtyard, on to which the room opened. Then, as if he found free thought difficult there, in the confined space of the small room, he moved to the door, and signed to the other to follow him.

'I'll get a hat,' he said; 'and we can finish our talk as I show you the way to the lodge gates. This thing once started, there must be no possibility of its missing its aim. You must be thoroughly coached up in all that it is necessary you should know. Come along!'

This time they did not pass through the

length of the house to reach the open air; they went out by the entrance communicating directly with the offices, and followed a road which led round that end of the house farthest from the west terrace and slopes; a road which skirted round the outer limits of the plantations, and joined the main drive at the bridge, halfway between the house and the lodge. It was a quiet road, lying in shadow all the way till the bridge was reached. After that it was merged in the more important drive, which travelled across the open park land, sloping gently towards the little town at the foot of the hill.

Petrovsky did not go further than the bridge; perhaps it was because he felt more at home stealing along in the shadow of the trees, than on the exposed road in

the light of the moon. He halted at the edge of the wood, and waited before turning back, to add a last word or two to all that had gone before.

'You understand that, though circumstances compel me to keep in the background, it is nothing more than justice that I am striving for?'

Yes, his companion signified assent to that.

'And the one thing I count on you to do, is to break off the match between the girl and the son of this lady of rank. See that you make the disclosure of the truth as objectionable as you possibly can. Above all, be afraid of nothing! I have made all due enquiries of the woman in whose house the girl was born, and, with regard to her true parentage, nobody knows anything whatever. You have a perfectly free hand;

you can play it as you like, without the slightest fear of being out-trumped by your antagonist's cards. That is all, I think. There is nothing else you want to know?'

No; there was nothing else. He was fully primed for the task in hand; and having said as much the shabby rascal answered the other's 'Good night,' and strode away in the direction of the lodge.

But when he had gone some distance, and was well out on the open ground, he pulled up with a sudden jerk, as if some new thought had struck him, and looked around him.

Yes; he really was there, in Penhala's park, and he really had undertaken to do this thing for Paul Petrovsky!

Once again he burst into laughter, as if he found something exquisitely droll in the whole idea. Very uncanny the sudden

outburst sounded, breaking thus vehemently across the silence of the night; and it was curious how the clamour, striking some rock or headland across the little bay, came back to him. But so purged and chastened, so wasted was it by the way, that it did not sound like the reckless laugh he had sent forth. It came back to him a sound so sad and desolate, so forlorn, so utterly lost, that it seemed to him as if his own castaway soul were laughing back at him out of space.

A weird idea to come to a man standing by himself in a lonely place in the middle of the night.

It stilled him. For some minutes he waited there debating, half unconsciously, many things.

Then he threw off the touch of solemnity, and moved on again towards the lodge.

But that echo had awakened others of its kind; and these others were not to be so easily silenced.

He fancied he knew the very headland that had thrown his laugh of defiance back at him. It was a sharp elbow of slate rock that stood out, a little this side of Tregarron Head. He remembered how grim and black it looked against the green bank beyond it.

A new desire came to him. He would like to see it under this moonlight. He turned swiftly on his heel, and went back the way he had come.

Mr. Petrovsky was late getting back to the house again that night. But Parsons had been so shocked at the idea of his being shut out, and having to spend the whole night roaming the woods, that he

had given special orders to Mrs. Quickly to make sure, for the future, that the young man was in his room before the house was finally closed. But for this precaution, when he came strolling up to the porch a little after midnight, he would have found the door closed against him for the second time. As it was, he found that his uncle's room, at all events, was closed against him; a circumstance which, so long as he stood face to face with the servants, appeared to cause him the keenest annoyance. It was not until he was alone in his room that he ceased to fume and worry, and then he turned from closing his door with a muttered—'So far, so good! Let the bomb burst without the slightest warning, so shall its execution be the more effective and complete.'

Perhaps it was in consequence of his

late wanderings afield that he was late down the next morning. When he made his appearance, with an apology for his want of punctuality, nearly everybody in the house was already gathered round the breakfast-table.

'The fact is I was out late last night, and I overslept myself,' he said, in reply to Penhala's expression of astonishment—for laziness was certainly not one of Paul's little sins. 'I undertook to see our friend, the wizard, off the premises, and we got into conversation, and—I did not get back to the house till some most unholy hour.'

'I wondered where you had disappeared to,' Penhala observed, carelessly. 'The fellow turned out very good company, then?'

Paul shot a curious glance at the speaker, a glance which warned him that

the subject was not one to be pursued.

'I found his conversation interesting,' he said, with a certain dryness of intonation which inferred that more lay behind. And then, as if starting a fresh subject, he added—'I did not like to disturb you when I came in, sir, but I heard some news last night that astonished me very much. I want to talk it over with you by-and-bye. No, Lady Glenhaggart,' he went on, meeting her ladyship's inquisitive glance with a smile, 'wild horses shall not drag it from me till I have first discussed it with my uncle. Hark! What is that?'

There fell a sudden hush round the table, a hush of attention. Outside in the hall there were voices raised in vehement altercation.

'I tell you, you must wait!' 'I tell you, I won't!' 'But they are at breakfast!'

'I don't care what they are at, I'm going to see Mr. Penhala this minute!' 'He will see you by-and-bye.' 'Blow your by-and-byes! My business can't wait. By the Lord above, if you don't stand away from the door, I'll bash your skull in!'

There was a scurrying of feet, as if somebody had been swung out of some other body's way, the screen before the door was dashed back with a violent blow against the wall, and the surprised people round the table saw their entertainer of the previous evening standing in the opening. Shabbier by many degrees he looked in the uncompromising morning light, and altogether less attractive. As he stood there, reckless and defiant, with his hat twisted over one ear, his whole appearance was suggestive of an early and injudicious application of Pinto's over-night generosity.

Sweeping the circle of amazed faces with a glance of swaggering audacity, he nodded familiarly.

Fitz and Paul rose to their feet as by one impulse.

'What the dickens—is the fellow drunk?' said Fitz.

Paul crossed quickly towards the door.

'Not now!' he said, aloud. 'You told me you would wait!'

'Oh, there you are!' cried the vagabond, with a tipsy laugh. 'I'm glad to see you. You'll do the introducing part of the business, and save us from any further awkwardness. Wait? I believe I did say something about it; but you see my paternal instincts were too much for me this morning, and I couldn't wait any longer. Now then, which one is it, eh? Come, old chap, tell the people who I am!'

Now that the other had taken the lead, Pinto hung back a little, not liking to interfere, but his fingers were evidently itching to be at the intruder's collar. Everybody round the table was up, the ladies a little scared, the men only waiting for a hint to organise a combined onslaught.

'What does it all mean, Paul?' said Penhala, moving forward. 'You seem to be in the secret—what does this gentleman want?'

'He wants his daughter!' put in Tom Jones, taking off his hat with a grandiose sweep of the arm in Penhala's direction. 'Put short, that's the whole of the matter. He wants his daughter, Mr. Penhala. The babby who was born seventeen years ago, down in the town there, and adopted by you in the place of your own, who died at

its birth—his daughter, who's been known all these years as your daughter—that's what this gentleman wants.'

Lady Glenhaggart dropped to her chair as if she had been shot. On the least encouragement she would have fainted, but there was none forthcoming; everybody's attention was otherwise engaged.

Penhala's face had gone the colour of wood ashes; he threw up his hands as if to stop the cruel disclosure; but there was no stopping it. Everybody in the room heard, and everybody saw corroboration of what they heard in his stricken agony.

Ellaline was the first to break the stony spell that had fallen on them all.

She was near Penhala, and after one or two quick glances from one face to another, she put her hands up to her throat, driving back the sickening sensation of strangu-

lation that threatened to overcome her, and went over to his side.

'Dearest, don't look like that!' she begged of him. 'Look at me! I don't feel it so much as you, and it is more sudden and terrible for me, you know.'

He did look at her, and moaned and turned from her again, as if the sight of her face, with that smile on it, was more than he could endure. But she put one hand under his arm, and with the other clasped his, hanging nerveless at his side, and, standing so, she faced the disreputable ruffian at the door.

'Whether you're my father or not,' she said, 'you have behaved most cruelly in coming here like this, and springing this surprise on us without a word of warning. Mr. Penhala has cared for me all these years, and you have not troubled yourself

about me once, till now, when you come peeping and prying round the house like a thief in the dark. I don't think what you say can be true—you would have behaved differently; but, true or not, your conduct this morning has been brutal—unpardonable—the conduct of a cruel man. If I am your daughter,'—it was wonderful to see how, as she spoke the obnoxious words, her strength of will overcame her repugnance—' if I am your daughter, you owe this gentleman a debt of gratitude, which no words could ever express, for his immeasurable goodness to me. And you pay it by coming here and creating a nine days' scandal in the presence of all his friends. I hope it is all a mistake—I pray it may all turn out a mistake. I am ashamed of you, and it

must be terrible to be ashamed of one's father.'

Tom Jones tried to laugh and treat the girlish harangue as a joke. Pinto's hands doubled up of themselves instinctively. Paul kept his post between them, muttering something about a row not improving matters.

Penhala put his arm round his little champion's shoulders, and held her to him. The first stun of the disclosure was past; as he turned to his friends at the table, he was himself again.

'Don't let this business disturb you,' he said. 'It is purely a matter for arrangement between this gentleman and me. I expect it has surprised you very much to find that my little girl is not really my daughter. I thought, when we came down

here, that something of this sort would happen; that was one reason why I kept away so long. I do hope you won't let this scene at all interfere with the pleasure of your visit, any of you. We will manage to settle matters without intruding them on your notice again.'

'Will you, though,' began the man at the door, but Fitz and Paul both turned on him with such unmistakable signs of their intentions in their looks, that he stopped and shrugged his shoulders.

'But, my dear Mr. Penhala,' cried Lady Glenhaggart, alive to the necessity of getting out of her present dangerous position with as little delay as possible, 'think of me! It is all very well for the rest of you, but think what a position I am placed in!'

'But, Lady Glenhaggart, you knew!'

'Knew there was a mystery, yes.' Her voice was plaintive to pathos, and her handkerchief was at her eyes with every other word. Her disappointment was genuine enough. A quarter-of-a-million, and such a house! 'The mystery I could have endured, but it is a mystery no longer. I put it to anybody—should I be doing my duty, as the stewardess of my dead husband's wealth, and as that boy's mother, if I allowed him to incur the responsiblity of such a father-in-law as that? I cannot consent to leave the matter in doubt for a moment, Fitzwarrene and I return to town to-day.'

This drew Fitzwarrene's blood-thirsty regards away from his victim at once.

'No, I'm dashed if we do, mother,' he

said, with more emphasis than elegance. 'At least, I speak for myself. If Mr. Penhala or Ella can make any use of me in this unfortunate muddle, I'm at their service. This affair doesn't alter existing arrangements a bit, it's nonsense to think it could!'

He crossed straight over to Ellaline and took her hand, and smiled down at her. But she could hardly see the smile for her tears, tears of pride in him, her chivalrous young lover.

Lady Glenhaggart lifted her handkerchief to her eyes again.

'I hope you don't intend to inflict any heroics upon us, Fitzwarrene,' she murmured, desolately. 'My nerves are shattered already. A display of theatrical sentiment would be more than I could endure. Have the goodness to find out if

there is any possibility of our reaching town to-night.'

Fitzwarrene carried his sweetheart's cold little hand up to his lips.

'I will be back with you in five minutes,' he said, and crossed over to his mother.

'Let me take you to your room, mother,' he said, quietly. 'This isn't the time to trouble Mr. Penhala with our little differences of opinion. You'll see things in another light when you've pulled round a bit.'

'I shall never see them in any other light,' she said, rigidly, as she took his arm, and so went from the room with her handkerchief still to her eyes.

Which clever little device robbed the exit of all awkwardness, so far as she was individually concerned. About any other

feature of the situation she was not likely to concern herself.

'Lady Glenhaggart has expressed herself rather unfortunately,' said Lucy Wentworth, trying not to look as ashamed of her step-mother as she felt, 'but I daresay she is right in the main point, Mr. Penhala. In this crisis you would rather have our room than our company. Oh, please don't trouble to be polite! We all know what a blow this must be for you, and I'm certain you can't be in the mood to play the host to a lot of visitors. If we all run away as fast as we can, you mustn't think it's because we want to cut poor little Ella. I agree with Fitz—I think it's nonsense to imagine this discovery can make any real difference, and I hope you'll bring her to see me as soon as you come

back to town. I, personally, am going because I should feel myself horribly in your way, while you've got this worry on your mind, and I expect we all feel something of the same kind.'

Penhala met the kindly little advance very gratefully on Ellaline's account.

Paul had carried the cause of all the hubbub off to the library, and there was a very cordial little ten minutes in the dining-room, between host and guests, before Penhala followed them there.

Ellaline he sent away to her own room, with orders not to show herself till sent for.

'My dear, you're not to frighten yourself,' he said, as he parted with her at the foot of the stairs. 'If the fellow were forty times your father, I wouldn't give you

up into his possession till we'd fought the thing out to the very end. Months, that would take, Ella; and in that time dozens of things might happen to spoil his claim. Perhaps, before then, Pinto will put in a claim of his own, you know—a husband's claim comes before anybody's. It will all come right in the end, my birdie, and you and Fitz will only love one another all the better for the passing cloud. I'm sorry, now, that I ever made a secret of the wretched business.'

But on that point Ellaline would not hear him.

To her he had always been the dearest father girl ever had. Whatever he had done, he had done for the best, and it was best. Her childhood would never have been the beautiful thing it had, if she had

known this fear was hanging over her. Whereas now, whatever happened, she would always have that time of perfect happiness to look back to. He had done quite right to keep the secret; she thanked him for that, as she thanked him for all the rest of his numberless goodnesses to her.

But as he went on to the library, with her close, eager kisses warm on his lips, he still shook his head. He could not divest his mind of the idea that, in leaving her open to the possibility of such a shock as this, he had deeply wronged her.

And meantime, between Paul and his charge, shut up together in the library, there had been a tremendous scene.

Tom Jones was already sick of his job, and wanted to back out of his bargain.

He was not so drunk, nor half so drunk, as he had pretended, and, for some occult reason, Ellaline's trouncing had got at his conscience, and stirred him up to a swift remorse.

'Look here!' he exclaimed, turning round on Paul before the library-door was fairly closed between them and the open-mouthed servants in the hall, 'you'll have to let me off the rest of this! I've had enough of it! You'll have to finish the job by yourself. I wouldn't go on with it for ten times the money.'

Paul went livid.

'You mean to throw me over?'

'No,' said Jones, tossing his dusty hat on to the nearest table, and thrusting his hand deep in his pocket, and stamping about the room like a caged beast, 'no; not exactly that—I'll keep my oath of

secrecy, but I won't go on with my share of the business. I tell you you're not going to set me up again, for that child to make a target of. I've done a good many mean things in my life, God knows, and never flinched; but this one is beyond me. I won't stand up before that girl's reproaches again, not if I know it! The poor, grieved little soul! Did you see the way she looked at young pepper-pod, when he put his spoke in? Hang it all! I wouldn't have done what I did—no, I wouldn't—not for five thousand, if I'd known.'

Petrovsky turned the key in the door, and came over and planted himself in the fuming man's path.

'Mr. Penhala will be here directly,' he said, 'there's no time for discussion. You've got to carry this thing out.'

'No, I won't! I'll see you to blazes first!'

'I tell you, you can't draw back now! Besides, it would be no use—the mischief is done—the match is off, you heard what the boy's mother said; for all her weepings and faintings, she is a woman with a will of iron, and the money is all in her hands.'

'Very good! Then your purpose is gained. You can do the rest without me.'

'And the five hundred pounds?'

'Damn your five hundred pounds! I tell you I'm sick of the business! I won't have any more to do with it!'

'You must stay and have this interview with Mr. Penhala.'

Tom Jones stood quiet, cogitating. Paul went on.

'Your staying can do neither good nor harm to the girl now. The main point of the disclosure being true, it doesn't make much difference whether the disreputable father remains on the scene or not.'

'I'll face it out with Penhala—' in the midst of all this turmoil, Paul noticed the unceremonious address—'but I won't face the girl's contempt again.'

'Very well. You shan't be brought in contact with her again, I give you my word on that! Only stand by until Lady Glenhaggart has taken her son out of harm's way, and I'll stand to my half of the bargain. So far you've managed admirably. That touch of intoxication was a happy ought on your part.'

Tom Jones turned on his heel, and walked off sulkily to the window. The memory of Ellaline's biting scorn was stil-

rankling in him. He could not glory in his blackguardism with the recollection of her shamed disgust still fresh in his mind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OTHER MAN'S HALF.

By midday all Penhala's guests, with the exception of Fitz, had taken their departure. Lady Glenhaggart's son had proved obstinate beyond his mother's worst anticipation, and was not to be frightened out of the position he had taken up by the strongest threat in the maternal vocabulary.

'When Mr. Penhala heard that she meant to cut him adrift, without even the traditional shilling, he would most

likely send him about his business smartly enough,' he told her.

'But he must leave him to take the initiative. As for cutting off, all in a hurry, and turning his back on the girl who had promised to marry him, the moment things went a little crooked with her—well, he hadn't got the cheek to do it; and that was the plain English of it! Of course his mother would do as she thought right about the money; and he wasn't going to act the humbug, and pretend he didn't care; because he did, he cared just as much as anyone else would; and he would do a good deal to please her, as she knew; but this one thing he couldn't do, and there was an end of it.'

So her ladyship went off with the rest of the smart crowd, Londonwards, and left

her son in the hands of the Philistines.

After he had, with all due politeness, seen his mother off, he went to seek out Mr. Penhala, and tell him what he had done. He found him in his own study, discussing matters with Petrovsky. Jones was not visible.

For once Fitz was genuinely despondent.

'You see, Mr. Penhala, I know exactly what a fool I am,' he said; 'I know I'm no catch for any girl, without my father's money to back me. If I'd got enough of my own to keep us in bread-and-cheese, I'd ask you to give Ella to me now, at once. But as things are now, I'm afraid we shall have to wait a bit. I'll try to get a post as secretary, or something of that kind—it can't be very difficult to

write a man's letters for him—and the minute I can see my way to put a roof over her head, I'll come for her.'

Penhala put out his hand across the table, and Fitz gripped it heartily.

'Do you think it is wise to offend your mother like this?' he asked.

Poor Fitz laughed, as if he found the question altogether too much for him.

'Of course I don't think it wise,' he said, 'but what is a fellow to do? If Ella is afraid to trust to me to do the best I can for her, she shall have her promise back, and welcome; only—I hoped—I thought, perhaps, she cared for me enough to take me and face the pinch.'

'But, my dear Fitz, have you forgotten that Ella is my heiress?'

'But, now?' cried Fitz. 'Not now?'

'Why not? You don't seem to re-

member that this discovery, which has fallen upon you all like a clap of thunder, is to me no discovery at all. I, at least, have always known that Ella was not my own child. I knew it when I made my will in her favour; the mere fact of her father turning up in this unexpected fashion, is not likely to alter my intentions.'

'Of course, you have known it always! I had forgotten,' said Fitz, trying to adjust his thoughts to this new view of the matter.

'I left my property to Ella, for her own sake entirely,' continued Penhala. 'For all these years, she has been the only living thing in this world that I have had to love. Paul will forgive my plain speaking—of his own will he removed himself out of my life; we have scarcely known each

other since he was a lad. But for this little maid of mine, my life would have been a blank, a bare, barren desert, without a blossom or a green twig to brighten its desolation. When I first took Ella under my care, I did it for my dead wife's sake, but I soon loved her for her own. She has always been the brightest, the most winsome, the most lovable creature that could gladden a man's home. As soon as she could put one foot in front of another, she learnt to find her way to me, wherever I was, and coax me out of my gloom. Even now I can feel the tender touch of her baby fingers on my face, little tendrils of love, toying tenderly round my surly lips, and coaxing up a smile, tendrils of love that wormed their way into my heart, and wrapped it round and held it close, and prevented the last scanty

drop of the milk of human kindness from oozing out, and leaving it a dry, withered husk of emptiness. When I think of what my life would have been without this little creature's love, I thank God for His goodness in sending her to me. She saved me from myself, from becoming the hardened brute my trouble was making of me. Well, then, owing her all my life has known of gladness all these years, what would you think of me if I dropped her as soon as she threatened to give me a little trouble? If you, who have known her three months, are ready to throw away your lawful inheritance for her sake, what ought I to be ready to do, who owe her this never to be fully paid debt? You shall marry her, Fitz, at once. We will interpose a husband's authority between her and this drunken vagabond, and I

will make it my duty to see that in the long run you don't suffer for it.'

Petrovsky, standing at the window with his back to them, felt like a stone image of despair, with the ruins of his painful labour at his feet. She would marry Pinto in spite of him! His scheming had but hurried on the catastrophe! After all his elaborate contriving, she would have to be removed from between him and this inheritance, by that last expedient of all!

As for Penhala and Fitz, they were too much occupied, in maturing plans and discussing possibilities, to give a thought to their silent companion. His acquiescence was taken for granted.

'I suppose there is no chance of disproving this man's parentage?' ventured Fitz, after a time. 'It is Ella I'm thinking of, sir. He will be a regular old man

of the sea to her. There is no hope that it is an imposture, I suppose?'

'I'm afraid not,' returned Penhala; 'it seems that he gave Paul the most detailed account of the whole affair. I wish Paul had come straight to me last night with the tale; we might have got Ella out of the way. According to the story he tells, his wife's sister died last week, and made a confession of the whole history on her death-bed—His wife's visit to Carn Ruth, the birth of her baby there, the very day of Ella's birth, the adoption of the child by the only rich man in the place—I don't see any reason to disbelieve the story. And there is an absence of motive too. Why should he suddenly pounce down upon us with this imposture?'

'Unless he wanted to be bought off,' suggested Fitz.

'But that is where the theory of imposture breaks down! He will not be bought off. He wants nothing more than his daughter, will take nothing more.'

Fitz felt defeated, but scarcely convinced.

'Where is Ella now?' he asked.

'She has gone to the cottage on Tregarron Head, to see Mrs. Smith, and to persuade her to return home with her.'

'And where is—her father?' The word stuck in his throat desperately.

'He has gone back to the town. I talked him into giving us twenty-four hours' grace. He is to come up again to-morrow morning, for a further discussion on the situation. But if you are willing to carry out the plan I have in my head, so far as he is concerned, there will no longer be a situation to discuss. Let us

take matters boldly into our own hands! Let us get away to London—you and Paul this afternoon, Ella and I to-night—and leave him here to lock the stable door when the steed is stolen. Why shouldn't you get a special license in the morning, and get married when Ella and I arrive in the afternoon? Dr. Burford will perform the ceremony, in the drawing-room at Eaton Square, and you can be off to the Continent by the club-train directly afterwards. As Ella's husband, you can stand between her and this drunken reprobate; and it is the only way, that I can see, to save her from him.'

Fitz had no words at hand to say what he thought of the suggestion. He could only mutter something about it being much better luck than he deserved. He took exception to one point in the arrange-

ments, though. Why could they not all go up together that same afternoon?

'Because,' Penhala explained, 'I want, if possible, to avoid anything in the shape of a rumpus with this fellow. Paul shall go down and interview him at the "Miner's Rest." He can tell him that you two are going up to London this evening, to take counsel with my lawyer. That will keep him quiet until to-morrow. Between three and four o'clock in the morning, Ella and I will leave here for Hoathly Road Station, driving ten miles across country, so as to avoid the most distant chance of meeting with him at the station here, and we shall be a good way on our journey before our friend is awake. These precautions are advisable chiefly on Ellaline's account—I am anxious to spare her the ordeal of any further scenes with the fellow.'

Fitz saw the force of this argument, but he did not like leaving Ellaline behind, within her father's reach.

'But if you wait and go up with us, you will be too late to secure your special license; and that will mean the loss of a whole day,' Penhala explained. 'This fellow may catch us up, and interfere to stop the marriage, unless we arrange matters so smartly as to prevent him.'

Again Fitz yielded against his own wishes.

'Does Ella know of this plan yet?' he asked.

And Penhala laughed a little, as he admitted that he had not known of it himself ten minutes ago.

'How could I form such a plan until I knew what your feelings were in the matter?' he asked. 'The scheme only came

into my head while we have been talking.'

'And do you think she will consent to it?' was Pinto's next inquiry.

Penhala looked a little amused.

'That is your share of the undertaking,' he said. 'Go down to Carn Ruth now, with Paul, and while he has his interview with Mr. Jones, you stroll on and meet Ella on her way back from Tregarron, and settle the matter for yourself.'

A hint which Fitz accepted with alacrity.

When Ellaline rapped at the door of the cottage on Tregarron Head, she had some difficulty in getting any attention. The little place had looked desolate enough yesterday, to-day it looked worse, or she imagined it did. To her, standing alone out there on the bare exposed hill-side, with no sign of life nearer than the high-

street, a mile away, at the foot of the steep slope, there seemed something fearsome in this elevated solitude.

It was like death, she thought, being alone up there, above the rest of the world.

Although she could hear voices inside, she had knocked twice without getting an answer. She was turning just to make a third attempt on the door when it was opened quickly, and her shock-headed little acquaintance of yesterday shot out into the sunshine, and closed it again hastily, and stood a moment, with her face to the door and her back to Ellaline, as if listening. Then she faced round, and put a hand between her red, swollen eyelids and the sunlight, and recognised Ellaline, and waved her back affrightedly.

'Oh, go away, go away, young lady!'

she exclaimed, in a strained, harsh whisper. 'This is no place for you.'

'But Mrs. Smith?' began Ella, retreating instinctively before the other's resolute manner.

'You've not come to fetch her away!' she cried, under her breath. 'She can't come to more harm than she's done already. He's dying, miss—dying fast—doctor says he won't see another sunrise. The lady promised him she'd stay, miss; promised she'd stay till the last. You've not come to take her away? She's been singing to him, off and on, ever since she's been here. It's the only thing that quiets him down a bit. He was a great singer himself once—used to sing in the church choir here, in this very place. Seems, now, as if her singing took him back to

them better times, and made his mind more peaceful. Let her stay till the end, dear young lady! It won't be for long!'

In all her life, Ellaline had never felt the need of her adopted mother as she was feeling it now. But this poor little soul had even greater need of her. It seemed, somehow, to happy little Ella, as if a great heavy cloud had suddenly blotted out all the joy and delight of life, as if, all at once, the world was nothing but a blank stretch of trouble and desolation. Five minutes ago she had thought herself the most unhappy creature in the world, but what was her trouble compared to this other's?

'No,' she said, gently, 'I won't take her away. I want to see her very badly,

but I'll do without her, until—you want her no longer. I'm sorry your husband is no better.'

'Better!' cried the little thing, with a quick catch in her throat. 'Better!'

She turned and put her arm against the wall of the cottage, and laid her stricken face low down on it. But when Ellaline, moved by an impulse of the tenderest compassion, would have gone to her, she waved her back again authoritatively, with eager decision.

'Don't come near me!' she entreated her, forcing the words out between her sobs. 'As like as not the fever's in my clothes. Don't come near me! Let me have my cry out, now I've begun. I can't cry inside there. Go away, young lady, dear. You can't do no good here; and I wouldn't like you to come to harm through

that angel woman's goodness. Go away, my dear.'

'If I could only help you!' said Ellaline, sorrowfully, her eyes filling up as she saw how the other tried to fight down her rending sobs.

'No, nobody can't do that,' she answered. 'We've made our beds, Morris and me, and we mustn't grumble if they are hard.' Then, as if some sudden thought had stilled her, she lifted her face for a moment, and spoke more quietly. 'It's a sore sight—a wicked man's death! If you ever feel inclined to work anybody a harm, just stop and remember you've got to die some time. When your last hour comes, it's bad to look back on a fellow-creature's spoilt life, and know it for your own work.'

She turned then, with a backward wave

of her hand, and went into the house, leaving Ellaline alone again on the green hill-side. It was the first time in her short, happy life that the girl had been brought near to death; she felt very awed and solemn as she took her quiet way back down the hill.

Half-way down, the path skirted round a knoll, and as she passed round, and the other slope of the little eminence came into view, she was just a tiny bit startled to see a man lying there, in the sunshine, with his hat tilted forward over his face. She was so close upon him that she was ashamed to turn back, but she stopped irresolutely, lacking the courage to go on; and in that instant of irresolution he 'became aware of her,' in some mysterious fashion, and pushed his cap off his eyes, and sprang to his feet, and stood

facing her. It was the juggler she had surprised on the terrace last night, her father.

For a moment they stood, mutely gazing at each other, and it was easy to see that he was even more disturbed than she by the meeting; then he turned abruptly and strode off in the direction of the town.

And then Ellaline recalled her words of a few hours ago, and went hot with shame and misery.

'Oh, stop, stop, pray stop!' she cried, in a very agony of penitence, and, flying down the steep, she caught at his arm and held him. 'I want,' she said, all breathless and eager, and fluttered by the encounter and her flying run, 'I want to beg your pardon for what I said this morning. It was cruel, cruel! The first time you had

ever seen me! I was so—so startled—I hardly knew—oh, please, please forgive me!'

He stopped instantly at the touch on his arm, but he did not turn to her. He had come out on this side of the town on purpose to avoid this child. And here she was, with her clinging touch on his arm, and her pure, candid eyes searching him through and through, and her sweet, bell-like voice—so marvellously like that other voice—asking him to forgive her! For a moment the impulse came to him to there and then make a clean breast of the whole imposition. That she should ask him to forgive her—him, on whose side lay all the cruelty and wrong-doing! A denial of the assumed relationship was at the very end of his tongue, when the remembrance of Petrovsky deterred him. He

would not cut the ground from under Paul's feet until he had at least warned him of his intention. 'Honour among thieves!' he remarked to himself, grimly.

'Forgive you?' he said, slowly. Standing there, face to face with her, his own share in the shabby fraud was so revolting to him, that for very shame he could hardly find words to speak to her. 'What have I to forgive, my child? It is I who should rather beg for forgiveness. To drop like a black blight on your happiness, and change at a breath all the blossoms of hope in your gay, pretty garden into foul ruin! Such cruel havoc as I made! But perhaps, even now, it is not too late to set some of the mischief straight again. I will do my best.'

'But you did not know—how could you?—of the trouble your sudden coming would

cause,' said Ellaline. 'And, even if you had caused ten times as much, it would be no excuse for what I said.'

'That you were ashamed of me—was that it?' he asked, smiling down at her penitent face. But it was only a lip smile. His eyes were sombre. 'Well, I don't think that was much to say—under the circumstances. I'll be bound you weren't half as ashamed of me as I was of myself, little girl.'

'But to say such a thing to my father!' she cried. 'My father, of all people in the world!'

He started as if she had stung him, and moved away a step so that her hand fell from his arm.

'Ah, I know it must have hurt you horribly,' she went on, putting her own meaning on the action; 'although you are

too good to say so, for fear of grieving me. Though you are so kind as to make light of it, I feel as if I should never forgive myself, never! Please say you forgive me—it will help me to forgive myself, perhaps.'

She came round determinedly, and planted herself in front of him, and lifted her hand with a quick movement, and pushed her hair and hat high up off her brow, as if, in her eagerness, their weight or their warmth worried her.

The slight gesture had an extraordinary effect upon him. Without moving his glance from her face, he saw, in a flash, Mary Fentimore sitting on a large old-fashioned couch, between the two high narrow windows of her Edinburgh lodgings, saw her toss off her hat, and push her fingers through her hair at her temples, and heard her say, quite distinctly,

'I have often wondered when and how you would next pay me a visit.'

He heard and saw it as distinctly as we hear and see things in the most vivid of dreams. But he was not dreaming! He was wide awake, on the slope of Tregarron Head, talking to Lancelot Penhala's adopted daughter, to the pretty child whom he had seen for the first time less than a week ago on the race-course at Epsom! What connection was there between her and that little incident in Mary Fentimore's lodgings? Or that other little incident in the garden of the Sussex cottage? Why was this girl always bringing back the long, long ago to him, in these strangely vivid flashes of memory?

Ellaline drew a little nearer to him, and put out a hand.

'You are faint!' she said. 'Don't, pray

don't look at me like that—as if I frightened you. Is it that I remind you of—somebody else? My mother?'

He passed a hand across his clammy forehead, and smiled at the irony of the situation.

'Yes,' he said, quietly. 'That is it—you reminded me of your mother.'

Seeing him like that, white, and dazed and shaking, restored her self-possession somewhat. In her gay, authoritative small way, she was so used to taking the lead, that she fell into her usual manner at once; only there was an added tenderness underlying her pretty masterfulness. She knew she was dealing with a creature sorely wounded, and her handling was delicate in the extreme.

'From the other side of this little knoll we can see the sea, right at our feet; and feel

the breeze blowing in from the entrance of the bay; and the sun is less powerful than here. We will go and sit there till you are quite yourself again, and you shall tell me about my mother. All my life I have so longed to have a mother—though indeed,' she added, with a little hurt flush at her own ingratitude, 'it is mean and unthankful of me to say that, when my dear Mamma Mary has loved me so dearly all my life. Ah, if you could know how these people have loved and cherished me all my life! You must see my dear Mamma Mary, and thank her yourself. I don't think I could have loved my own mother better. Shall I see her—my mother? Are you going to take me to her?'

He shook his head.

'No,' he said, 'I have done you all the harm I am likely to do. I shall not in-

flict my presence upon you any more. I have promised to stay and have another interview with Mr. Penhala to-morrow, but I am not sure I shall even do that. I think I will write and explain my motives instead. You and I will bid one another good-bye here, and, when you know all there is to know about me, you must not be too hard upon me. I was tempted beyond my strength, you see, and I fell—as I always have fallen before temptation. You will go into a great passion when you hear, just as you did this morning,'—as she put up a quick, imploring hand, he took it in his own and held it, and smiled down at her indulgently,—'yes, you will. For two minutes your eyes will flash, and your cheeks will flush, and your hands will shut themselves up tight, and the whole of your little person will quiver with

indignation and resentment, and you will say far worse things of me than you said this morning, and—I shall deserve it all. And yet—while your eyes are still unopened to my enormity—I am going to ask you, when that first burst of passion is past, to try sometimes to think a little kindly of me; as of one who was unfortunate as well as wicked, one who caused the shipwreck of his life mainly by acting first and thinking afterwards, a poor, invertebrate thing, who lacked the strength to stem the torrents crossing his road, but one who seldom sinned against another in cold blood. I want a kind thought from you desperately, because you remind me of somebody I once loved very, very dearly.'

'My mother?' murmured Ellaline. 'Is she—is she dead?'

'My child, I don't know!' Her little interpolation had not severed the thread of his thoughts. He did not grasp the fact that she and he were speaking of different people. It was Mary, and Mary only, that his mind was full of.

'You don't know?'

'No, she—that is I——Well, I have always been a ne'er-do-well, and her life with me grew unendurable, I suppose, and so she found she could do better for herself without me.'

'She left you!' Ella's eyes were flashing again.

'Yes, but I was always a bad lot, you see.'

'And was that not a reason why she should stand by you, and help you against yourself? And, besides, I don't believe it quite, not that you were ever bad enough

to drive her to—to—oh, it was very cruel of her! She was a wicked woman!'

'No, not that. You must not say that. I have always stood out against that. I think, at first, that there must have been some fatal blunder. And then, afterwards, I could not take a single step in search of her, because, when we married, the gain was all on my side, the loss all on hers. And so, when she chose to put me out of her life, I did not see how I could thrust myself back into it again. I daresay I was wrong, I generally am; it is easier to me to think that than the other. To me she was the sweetest, purest, best woman the world ever held. And I can still say with all my heart, "God bless her!" Sometimes, as now, when I am right away from the seething roar and vice of the big towns, when I spend a

whole long day in the free, fresh air, and am able to get to sleep of a night without first muddling my brain with drink, sometimes then, between sleeping and waking, I fancy she is back with me.' He lifted his hand, and pointed across the little bay. 'You see the waterfall, leaping down the face of the cliff across the bay there?'

Ellaline glanced for an instant where he pointed, and brought her eyes back assentingly to his face. There was a strange, intense sympathy between them during the whole of the interview. She had no eyes, no thought for anything but him and his story.

'I slept there last night, in one of the overgrown little arbours half-way up the cliff. I don't think I meant, when I went there, to stay the whole night, but I got so worked up in the interview with Paul

Petrovsky, that I felt a house would not hold me; and it seemed to me that, if I went there, other thoughts, memories rather, would drive out those that were setting my brain in a whirl. Well, I went and lay down there, and thought of many things in the past.'

Had he known this place before then? was the thought in Ellaline's mind, but she would not interrupt him.

'Terrible things, calamitous things, but —because they were so far away in the past, I suppose—their terror and their calamity did not stir me as the insignificant meeting with Petrovsky had done. Lying out there among the ferns, with the tamarisk boughs swinging gently to and fro between me and the stars, and the swish, swish of the tide beating out its monotonous sing-song on the beach below,

I gradually quieted down into a state of absolute rest, which was yet not sleep—no, it was not sleep, you will see that for yourself, presently.'

He paused for an instant, but only to draw a deep breath, to gather his energies together, as it were, to carry him right on to the end.

'Lying out there like that, with the sound of the tide below me and the glimmer of the stars above, alone with the night, one of the terrible things—or memories—that was bound to come into my mind, was the recollection of a man swinging himself up the face of the cliff, just beyond the falls, the very piece of the cliff that I could see from where I lay; swinging himself up from rock to rock, and threatening to murder me as he went. The recollection haunted me through the

early part of the night. Every time I shut my eyes I could see him fighting his way furiously up the steep slope, until at last, when I opened them again, it seemed to me that he was really there—that same man—standing on the other side of the trickling waters, looking at me. It is a man I have not seen, nor even heard of, for over twenty years, and so I had no fear that he would recognise me; but still it was an uncomfortable situation, lying there with the feeling that he was watching me. It grew so unbearable at last that I sat up, and pushed the ferns aside, to ask him what he was doing there. And then I saw that it was not—not the person I had imagined—it was a woman, the woman I spoke of—Mary . . . Just as I knew her she looked, except her hair —that was quite white.

'I could never express to you the feeling it gave me to see—her—there. For you see, just then, at first, I was convinced that it was her very self, in the flesh. I should think I sat there for quite five minutes, holding the ferns aside with both my hands, and peering out at her. At last I could stand it no longer, and I leapt up on to my feet, and went to the edge of the stream, and put out my hands and said, "Mary, will you come to me?" That was all I could think of to say, after a separation of eighteen years.'

'And she came?' asked Ella, in a whisper.

'She couldn't. She pointed to the stream between us, and shook her head; and when she put her hand out I first noticed the dead whiteness of her flesh. It was my wife, but dead!'

'Dead?'

'Dead. I saw then, what I had not seen before, that she was swathed from head to foot in soft, white linen, like the grave-clothes painters put in their pictures sometimes. "Have you come for me, then?" I said. "If you can't come to me, I can come to you." She raised both her hands then, with their palms towards me, and drew her arms back to her sides and shot them forward again, three times—like this—as if she were warning me away from where I stood. But I was reckless by this time, and I sprang across the falls—a child could leap them at this time of the year—with some mad words about being glad to die, if death would bring me to her——'

'Yes?' He had stopped abruptly. Ellaline was holding her breath.

'That is all. When I got there—where she had stood—there was nothing.'

'Nothing?'

'Only a few streamers of hart's-tongue waving faintly in the breeze, and throwing tremulous shadows on the pale face of the cliff.'

Ellaline drew a long, quivering breath of relief.

'It was a dream, after all!'

'But I was awake!'

'You thought so.'

'But my boots were wet, and when I went back to my lair the ferns were all broken and crushed, where I had held them.'

'Still, it was a dream—people move, oh, quite frequently, in their sleep. Do you not think yourself it was a dream?'

He picked up a handful of pebbles, and

tossed two or three of them, one after the other, over the brink of the cliff before he answered.

'If I had a grain of superstition in me, I should say it was what old women call "a warning."'

'A warning against what?'

'Against the job I had in hand—against claiming you. My feeling was so strong in the matter that, if my word had not been passed, I should have run away there and then, and never willingly have set eyes on you again.'

Ellaline put out a small, ungloved hand, and laid it on his; very dainty it looked against the deep tan of his skin.

'I am glad—now—that you did not do that,' she said, softly. 'You may hardly believe it—after my cruel behaviour this morning—but I am; very glad. I don't

know yet what may happen, now that this discovery has come about; but for you, at least, I hope it may bring nothing but good. It will be something to have a daughter to love you, even if she is only a foolish, frivolous individual like me. I think you are one who wants a lot of love, father.'

Now that, at last, the word had come, all her impulsive heart went out in it. Her voice was very tender and sweet as she reached the end of her little speech. But he threw her hand from him, and leapt to his feet, and stood looking down at her, as if he expected to see her change into somebody else under his very eyes. What was it? In what did this curious hallucination consist? It was so subtle, so intangible, and yet so real!

As he stood there disturbed, shaken and

altogether unnerved by her use of that word, Fitzwarrene Pinto came hurrying round the steep rise of the knoll into view, and broke the strained silence that had fallen on them, with his pleasant, bright, matter-of-fact young voice.

'Oh, there you are!' An astonished pause, while he took in the evident signs of emotion on both their faces. 'I hope this—gentleman has not been annoying you, Ella?' Then, reassured by Ellaline's emphatic disclaimer on that point, 'I left Mr. Petrovsky looking for you, in the town below, sir. He has some important information to give you, I believe.'

'And I him!' came the prompt answer. 'He is the very person I want to see. Good-bye, little comforter. I'm glad we met.'

Ellaline rose quickly and put out her hand.

For a moment he stood looking at it in a troubled indecision, then, shaking his head, quickly and resolutely, he turned off and passed beyond their view.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELLALINE IS NOT AFRAID.

When Petrovsky's co-conspirator got back to the inn, he found that the Russian had been and gone again, leaving word that he would come back in half-an-hour, and requesting 'Mr. Jones' to await his return.

He went on at once up the stairs to his own room. His mind was now quite made up as to his future course of action, and he would not waste one unnecessary moment in carrying out his decision. He meant to acknowledge to Penhala that

this assumed parentage of his adopted daughter was an impudent hoax, taking the entire responsibility of the affair on his own shoulders, and leaving Petrovsky's name out of the business altogether. When Paul came back he would see him, and tell him of his intention. He would write a confession of the imposture, and post it to Penhala on his way out of the town.

He was thoroughly alive to the risk he was running in carrying out this decision, but that consideration had no shadow of influence with him. He knew it was more than likely that Penhala would have him followed and taken into custody; and that, as the reward of his imposture, he might possibly spend a longer or shorter period in the county jail; but, whether it fell out so or not, the anticipation should have no weight with him—he would not for an

hour longer lend himself to the persecution of the sweet, lovely little creature who had called him father.

Regarded from his point of view, the thought of Lancelot Penhala committing him to jail as a rogue and vagabond was not without its humour. Rather grim humour it was, judging by the mixed quality of his smile as he contemplated the possibility.

There was one contignency, though, which it behoved him to guard against with the nicest care—the chance of Penhala—or anybody else, for that matter—finding out *the whole truth* concerning him and his past. That was a misfortune which, with all his determination to do the right thing by Ellaline, he would not face at any cost. And he took his measures for its prevention accordingly.

He pulled off his shabby tweed jacket, and sat down by the table under the window, and set to work to rip the seam inside the back of the collar. There was a soiled, flat, narrow packet sewn in under the tailor's stiffening. He wondered, as he sat there carefully cutting the stitches with his pocket-knife, how many coat-collars that limp packet had lined in its time. He had always kept it, thinking it would help to establish his identity after death. But now that he was at last going deliberately to put himself within reach of the law, now that he was going to expose himself to the risk of a vigorous police examination of his few belongings, there was another danger to guard against—the danger of having his identity established while he was still alive.

After having successfully evaded

detection all these years, the thought of its overtaking him at last, like a tardy vengeance, set his heart leaping for very fear. Yes, those incriminating scraps of paper must go at last. As he drew the time-worn packet from its hiding-place, and unfolded the cotton wrappings, he sighed a little; and even as he sighed he smiled at the folly of it, and yet sighed again, such creatures of long habit are the most reckless among us.

Those few frayed scraps of paper formed the last link between him and a youth so joyous, so heedless, so untroubled, that sometimes, in looking back at it, he asked himself whether it had ever existed in reality, whether it was not rather an hallucination from which he could not free himself. Perhaps the reluctance to part with those last tokens of

his identity was not so difficult to understand after all.

He fingered the poor, frail fragments very tenderly, as he separated them one from the other, and laid them in a row on the table under the window. When he had them all laid out he sat a moment or two, with his chin resting in his hollowed palms, looking at them. It was a kind of formal leave-taking he was going through; none the less sorrowful, perhaps, for his own inclination to treat the little touch of sentiment with derision.

Among the scraps of print there was one piece of note-paper, to which he devoted a special share of attention.

It was the half-sheet which Nita Morelli had put in his wife's writing-case, after separating it from its other half—from the half which held the explanation of what

had gone before, and contained the instructions for future communication with her.

'It seemed to me you could not help but resent this upspringing of a new interest in my life,' he read, and smiled pitifully to himself in the reading; 'the strongest, the most absorbing interest I have ever known. I have loved you, John, you cannot doubt it, and yet, now, I sometimes ask myself if ever before I have known the fullest depths of my own heart—that utterly selfless love, which could count the sacrifice of everything that makes life pleasant as nothing, when the benefit of its object is the end in view.'

He moaned as he read, and brought his clenched fist down on the paper. Then he laughed at his own imbecility.

He supposed he was getting old, and there was no fool like an old fool. And so, with a swift outstretching and drawing together of his hands, he brought all the worn scraps up in a heap, meaning to carry them to the empty grate and set light to them. But even as he rose there came a sharp knock, followed by the unclosing of the door.

It was the work of an instant to the man by the window to drop his jacket over the scraps of paper. But the window faced full down the bay, and at the opening of the door, the draught, rushing furiously through the room, snicked in between the falling jacket and the table, and whisked away one of the smallest scraps, and blew it across to the foot of the bed, where it lay unnoticed at the edge of the chintz valance.

It was Petrovsky who had entered. He shut the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock.

'I have been hunting for you this past hour,' he said, speaking as he locked the door, and grinding his words out with a low, dull monotony, which caught his hearer's attention at once.

For all its quietness, the tone told its own tale to the listener, and prepared him in some degree for the look on Paul's face when he turned towards the room again. It was a blending of the supremest heights of two absolutely antagonistic emotions, mental anguish and self-repression, and the combination was terrible to look upon.

It was as if he wore a stone mask, which the furnace of his emotions had rendered incandescent from within, but which yet

preserved its rigidity because of its nature, which could allow no sign of yielding, short of flying asunder in fragments, at the moment of complete annihilation.

The internal furnace was his anguish of soul, the stone mask his power of self-repression.

'Why have you been out of the way?' he asked.

'I have signed no contract which makes me answerable to you for my comings and goings,' answered the other, curtly.

'Don't let us quibble about trifles.' He still stood at the door, almost, as it seemed, because he was glad to steady himself against something. That he was undergoing some intense strain was palpable to the meanest observation. 'Last night, when you and I planned this comedy, I

told you what my object was, to break off the match between the foundling my uncle has adopted, and young Pinto. Three hours ago, when you left the house, I thought this purpose was accomplished. It was not. There is an elopement arranged; they are to be married privately, at my uncle's town house, to-morrow afternoon.'

'Well?'

'The marriage must be prevented somehow, it shall be! This crisis has come on me so unexpectedly, that I am bewildered. I can plan nothing, arrange nothing for the future. My brain won't carry me beyond the immediate necessity of the moment, the necessity of interposing some obstacle to stop the carrying out of this scheme. By some means or another you must get the girl away from the

house before midnight, and keep her away out of sight for a few days, until I can communicate with you.'

The man by the table crossed to the fire-place, thus placing the bed between him and Petrovsky, and took a bank-note from under one of the heavy china ornaments on the mantel-piece.

'I will do nothing of the sort,' he said, with the most absolute determination of tone and manner. 'I will have nothing more to do with the affair, in any way whatever. I told you this morning that I had had enough of the dirty business; now I am more determined than ever. You must get out of the hole the best way you can. There is the twenty pounds you paid me on account. Now I am free of the bargain.'

He folded the note in half as he was

speaking, and tossed it on to the bed towards his companion. It fluttered open as it went, and travelled through the rail at the bed-foot, and lay close to the rubbed, frayed piece of newspaper on the carpet.

'More than that,' he went on, 'I am going to back out even of what I have done. In a hour from now I shall be out of this place for good; but, before I go, I mean to write to Mr. Penhala, and admit that the fathership business was all a hoax——'

'You would betray me?'

'No; not that! I shall leave you out of the matter altogether, say that I overheard from some of the people here that the young lady was only an adopted daughter, and that it put the idea of claiming her into my head. I've got no

spite towards you in the matter at all, you know, it is only that I am sick of my share in the job.'

As he crossed slowly to the foot of the bed to pick up his discarded bribe, the still, tense horror of Petrovsky's manner was ghastly. God only knew the agony he endured at that moment, at finding himself once more face to face with that last awful, fell necessity, the removal of Ellaline *by his own action.*

As he stooped for the money his head and face passed for the moment below the bed, out of the other man's sight; and as he raised himself again, he uttered a sort of gasp, almost as if he had hurt himself in the stooping. He had picked up the scrap of newspaper with the note, and he looked from the shred of printing to the man's face opposite, and back again to the

paper in his hand, and then again to the other's face, with a slow, dawning comprehension in his eyes of some fact but that instant made apparent. Then, as if seeking corroboration of something well-nigh incredible, his glance flashed round the room, lighted on the coat, with the ripped collar lying uppermost, on the table, and, before the other scented the least danger, he had dashed across the intervening space, snatched up the coat to examine the newly-made opening, caught sight of the papers underneath, and grabbed a handful of them tightly in his grasp.

The man by the fireplace made no movement. The time for that was past. They stood eyeing one another, both breathing quickly, both, but for that, as motionless as death. It was Petrovsky who spoke. He lifted

the hand still holding the bank-note, and read out,

'The government has, we understand, offered a reward of a hundred pounds for such information as shall lead to the arrest of John Penhala; against whom the coroner's jury, at the inquest on Hagar Polwhele last week, returned a verdict of wilful murder.'

The silent man opposite listened curiously.

Though he knew the words so well that he frequently repeated them to himself in his dreams, he had never *heard* them till now. He listened with a strained attention, almost as if he expected to discover some new shade of meaning in the curt sentence, now that it was at last clothed in sound. It was a curious sensation, hearing it for the first time after all these

years. He shivered slightly as the end was reached, just as the leaves shiver at the tip of the pendulous birch boughs, when the first breath of the approaching storm sets the still summer air in motion.

Petrovsky picked another piece of paper, hap-hazard, from the bunch in his other hand, and read again:

'It is reported in Carn Ruth that Morris Edyvean is missing. Morris Edyvean is the man whose evidence resulted in a verdict of wilful murder against John Penhala, at the inquest on Hagar Polwhele last week. Edyvean, according to popular rumour, was the girl's sweetheart before John Penhala came on the scene, and it is currently reported that his disappearance from Carn Ruth is the result of an oath of vengeance against the murderer.

He has sworn to track John Penhala, and, sooner or later, to bring him to justice."

Again there was a spell of silence, and again they looked at each other as if words were altogether inadequate to the situation. And then Petrovsky laughed, and at the sound the other shuddered again, but spoke not a word.

'To think,' said Paul, 'how blind we have all been! To think that in another hour you would have been off, out of the place again, and we none of us the wiser! To think how Morris Edyvean, after waiting all these years, would have ground his teeth at missing such a chance of paying off his old score! My very good friend, you will reconsider that determination of yours. You will discover a more obliging frame of mind, I am certain. You will stand by me through this matter to the

very end. Indeed, there are very few things that you would not do to oblige me, my good cousin John.'

Still John neither spoke nor moved. If, in addressing him thus familiarly, Petrovsky's motive had been to startle him into an appeal for mercy, the trick failed completely. Tinkering attempts to patch up the crisis were of no use now. And there was no room in his mind for such. This overwhelming crash of ruin had stunned him to all else. His understanding grasped only the one stupendous fact—At last he would have to face the hideous horror of a trial for murder, ending, as he knew it must end, in his condemnation and —his hanging! For twenty-two years he had nursed this grisly terror in his heart, now at last it was out, at large; visible, threatening, more awful a thousand times

than he had imagined it. He would hang by the neck until he was dead! The whole tragedy flashed through his mind in a twinkling of the eye-lid—his awakening in his cell on that last fateful morning of all, the dull boom of the tolling-bell, the coming of the hangman and the chaplain — a gruesome companionship — the procession through the prison corridors, the chaplain's monotonous voice reading the service for the burial of the dead—for him, he was the dead—the ascent of the gallows-steps, one, two—ten in all, each one taking him nearer to eternity—the touch of the hangman's hand pulling the cap over his face, placing the rope round his neck, the harsh contact of the hempen cord with his skin, the breathless moments of waiting for the first sound of the moving bolts, and then—ah, God! let him

get air, water—something to lift him out of this awful phantasy, or he would die there, before his time!

Blanched, shaking, with every sign of physical cowardice upon him, he staggered across to the washing-stand against the opposite wall, and plunged his head and face in the basin.

Paul watched him with a dull curiosity. To him it seemed strange that the other should fear death so vividly. For his part death would have been easy enough; it was the living that was so terrible; the living of a life shadowed, as his was, by the constant consciousness of coming events.

John sat down after his drenching, with the water trickling in rivulets down his brown throat, and across the loose collar of his red shirt. He was shaking still, but

his face was a healthier colour, and he had regained some sort of control over his wits.

'It was sudden,' he said, huskily; 'it took me unawares! There was some excuse—a secret of twenty-two years standing—to have it sprung on you like that.'

'Perhaps,' said Paul, curtly. 'You know Edyvean is back here—at the cottage on the head yonder?'

'For God's sake no more of that torture! Tell me what it is you want me to do.'

Petrovsky's features quivered. His own fury of emotion had calmed down somewhat in presence of the other's; now it began to show itself again.

'This opportune discovery has strengthened my hands, just when they most needed strengthening. You will buy my silence

at the price of your own absolute obedience to my directions.'

'Go on!'

Petrovsky, still standing by the table under the window, reached across and pulled the casement to; and went and sat on the edge of the bed, near enough to his companion to carry on the conversation in a mere murmur.

'Your life is in my hands,' he began, 'and since you seem to set a remarkably high value on it, I think I'm pretty safe in returning the compliment, and placing mine in yours.'

John lifted his eyes to the speaker's face.

'That's right, I want your best attention. I have only a few minutes longer to stay, and I have plenty to explain to you. You have heard the how and the why of my

father's death, and, if you have thought about the matter, you will have guessed that I, too, am vowed, body and soul, to the Cause for which he died. This Cause has need of the Penhala wealth, to which I am the lawful heir. That is why I am fighting so hard for the inheritence, why I shall fight to the last, let the obstacles be what they may. It would take too long to explain all the details of the matter to you, but however much I explained you would still regard me as a brother murderer.'

'I am no murderer!'

'Chut! The world thinks you one—the difference is only a matter of your own opinion of yourself—I choose to think you one, because it makes matters so much easier between us. Half-an-hour ago I had no more violent measures in my mind, as far as your complicity is concerned, than

the temporary removal of this girl Ellaline from Lancelot Penhala's protection. Now, however, I am going to put into your hands the task of removing her permanently.'

'You mean——?'

'I am going to explain what I mean. Between now and nine to-night you must mature some plan for getting the girl out of the house, unknown to anybody but your two selves. Once that is done, you must persuade her into accompanying you on a railway journey—are you listening?'

John's head had fallen forward between his hands. He raised it again with a muffled moan, and Petrovsky resumed:—

'There is a train leaves Cluth-hoe junction at a quarter-past ten for Exeter—there are very few first-class passengers travelling at that hour—there will be

no difficulty in securing a compartment to yourselves. Once that is accomplished the rest is simple.' He took from his pocket a minute metal box, about half an inch thick, and as large round as a sixpence. 'At Plymouth you insist upon your charge taking a cup of coffee, or a glass of milk, or something, anything. As you carry the cup from the refreshment room to the carriage, you will drop the globule inside this box into it. A quarter of an hour after you have resumed your journey the girl will get drowsy, and fall into a sleep, from which nothing will ever awaken her.' Again John's head drooped forward till his face was hidden from view. 'Then you open the door of the carriage—the line is through a most lonely country just there, twenty miles to the north of Plymouth—and put the girl out

on the line, letting her fall under the train if you can manage it, so that there will be no need to inquire into the cause of death. Then you ring the communicator—unless you are clever enough to be able to break it without ringing it; in which case there will be so much the more likelihood of your escaping detection—if the body is left there until your next stoppage it may be further mutilated by a following train——'

'God of Heaven!' cried John, springing up and making a leap for the speaker. 'Are you a man at all, to propose such a plan to me in cold blood?'

But Petrovsky was too quick for him, and got the bed between them.

'Pooh!' he said, slipping his hand into an inner pocket, and displaying the handle of a revolver, 'when a man goes about

with his life in his hand, as I do, do you think he is such a fool as to risk being throttled over the first little difference of opinion that happens between him and his instruments? I am too used to danger for that. Last night even, when I heard where you had been found—hiding outside the windows in the dark—I made up my mind you were a spy, sent down to see that I did not flinch from my duty. One gets used to that sort of thing. Come, decide for yourself! It is not too late to draw back, make your own choice—a chance of escape this way—certain death the other. If the people here once know who you are, you are a dead man. If you maintain your disguise and carry out my plan, you are not likely to be even suspected of having had a hand in this child's death. If you swear she threw herself

out on to the line, who is to prove the contrary? And what motive would there be for violence on your part? You can concoct a story that she threw herself out in a frenzy of despair, because you were carrying her away from her sweetheart.' All this time he had held the small metal box between his thumb and finger. Now he folded it up compactly in the banknote he had picked up from the floor—John watching the performance in dazed misery—and so threw them together on to the bed.

'There is your ammunition,' he said. 'See that it does not miss fire.' And turning swiftly, he passed out of the room and shut the door behind him.

John, left by himself, stood a moment looking at the little packet, then, throwing up his hands with a gesture of the

supremest despair, he picked it up and put it in his pocket.

After dinner Ellaline was in her room with her maid, packing; or rather the maid was packing and Ellaline was looking on, when one of the housemaids knocked at the door and handed in a sealed letter.

Ellaline was in a state of tearful agitation. Things to-day had combined to upset her nerves. To be claimed at breakfast time by a travelling conjurer as his daughter, after believing all her life that she was Lancelot Penhala's child, and a few hours later to receive another shock in the shape of a suggestion of a runaway marriage; and, almost worst of all, to be compelled to go away without so much as a single word of explanation with her dear Mrs. Smith; without a good-bye

kiss from the best and dearest friend that a motherless girl was ever blessed with! The experiences of the day had been enough to try nerves of a tougher fibre than Ellaline's.

She sprang forward when she saw the note in her maid's hand. Perhaps it was from Mrs. Smith. She hurried over to the lamp to read it; and though she saw at a glance that it was not from Mrs. Smith, the first sentence caught her closest attention.

'Since I left you this morning, the most extraordinary crisis in my life has come about. I have received news of your mother. She is in the neighbourhood. She wants to see me and you. Will you trust yourself with me for an hour, without saying a word to a living creature? We will go to her together. After send-

ing this to you, I will wait for half-an-hour in the place where you found me last night, between the buttress and the large stone vase, on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows. It seems to me that the whole of my future is in your hands. In this crisis, will you stand by your unfortunate father?'

Ellaline slipped the note into her pocket, and took a hat and cloak from the wardrobe.

'The house is stifling,' she said to the busy maid, 'I am going for a breath of air. I think you can finish without me now. When you have done, go to bed at once. You will be fit for nothing unless you get a few hours' rest before we start.'

She hurried away down the stairs, across the hall, through the unlit drawing-room, and out on to the terrace.

'How glad I am!' she cried, tremulously, with both hands out, as a figure moved into sight from the shadowy recess behind the vase. 'How glad! Where is she?'

'You are not afraid then?'

'Afraid? Of you? After our talk this morning? No, indeed! Only so glad to find I am likely to be of a little help. Come, let us go! Where is she?'

He put her hand under his arm, and led her away, in the direction of the whispering pines.

CHAPTER IX.

A MOTHER'S VIGIL.

Mr. Penhala was resting quietly in the library to prepare himself for his early start. It had just struck eleven when Parsons knocked at the door and came in, with the information that Mrs. Smith had returned, and wanted to see him.

'She is changing her clothes,' he said. 'She thought it better to be on the safe side. She was afraid, finding the house so quiet, that you might have gone to

your room, and she says she must see you to-night, sir.'

'Does she know anything of all this fuss?' asked Mr. Penhala.

But that was a question Parsons was unable to answer. He did not see how she could, shut up as she had been ever since yesterday morning; and yet he had to confess that, during the minute she had stood talking to him in the hall, there had been something very unusual in her manner.

'All of a tremble she was, sir—hardly seemed to know what she was saying for excitement.'

'Then I expect she has heard something as she came through the town. Very likely she is fagged, too, with her nursing. Bring some wine and sandwiches. She may be glad of something while I am

telling her all that has occurred in her absence. Is Miss Penhala still up?'

'I think not, sir. She told her maid she should not want her any more to-night, some time ago.'

'Then see that she is not disturbed on account of Mrs. Smith's return. She must get what rest she can. And, Parsons, don't forget the wine.'

Parsons murmured an assent as he closed the door softly behind him; but five minutes later, when Mrs. Smith entered the room, Penhala saw at a glance that wine and sandwiches were quite out of the question in her present condition.

She was in that curious state of mental exaltation, in which the frame for a time is supported entirely from within; to eat would have been an impossibility to her. She would in all probability suffer for the

abstinence by-and-by, but just now she was physically incapable of taking nourishment. Her very manner of crossing the room expressed something of this; her flexible lips were agleam with eagerness, and the soft, quick flash of her eye spoke plainly of the stirring of some vivid emotion.

She did not wait to let Penhala begin his story; she was too eager to impart her own.

'You know whom I have been nursing?' she asked, even while he was greeting her, and telling her how glad he was to see her at home again.

The manner of the enquiry stopped his recital at once. What was coming now? Something of weighty importance undoubtedly.

'You don't know?' she said, as he shook his head. 'I thought you would

have heard. It was Morris Edyvean. He is dead, poor fellow, died two hours ago.'

Morris Edyvean! Pre-occupied as he had been, the mention of that name drove his present perplexities away at a breath, and plunged him back bodily into the never forgotten past. It was so full of ghosts, that past of his; and of all those disembodied spectres of 'the-might-have-been,' none had such power to pain him as the memory of his son; that faint wraith of a vanished individuality which sometimes, even yet, glimmered at him from the bottom of an unreachable abyss, like the face of one long since dead.

To hear Morris Edyvean's name again, after a silence of twenty years, took him back with a bound to the time when it

had been on everybody's lips, as the denouncer of this much-loved son of his. It was natural it should shake him a little. And he was dead—this relentless enemy of John's!

'But before he died,' continued Mary, with that strange light in her eyes, that indescribable thrill of subdued emotion in her voice, 'he confessed, fully and freely, that his accusation against your son, of the murder of Hagar Polwhele, was false—false from beginning to end!'

Penhala went white to his lips, and made as though to rise. Mary, with a self-possession which seemed almost inspired, filled a glass with wine and held it to him; going on meantime with her recital.

'I have the whole confession on paper, signed by him. The girl's death was the

result of an accident—the purest accident. She slipped down the river bank—when she fell, your son was not within a yard of her—she sprang backwards to avoid him, and the bank was steep, and slippery with snow. John did not touch her. If your son were alive he could come back here this moment, and take his rightful place at your side, as the stay and comfort of your declining years.'

She drew a great breath of relief and stopped. Now that she had vindicated John's memory in his father's sight, a strange little touch of peace fell upon her. In her great gladness she did not fully realise all that this disclosure meant to the just-minded man opposite. She had always known of John's innocence; he had known nothing of it; had, in fact, accepted the boy's disappearance, and his

resolute self-effacement, as proof of his guilt; and now, after the lapse of twenty-two years, this declaration of his innocence came upon his father like the crash of an earthquake, and his world seemed shaken to its foundations. His thoughts were too overpowering for words; he listened to the disclosure in perfect silence, sitting with his head bowed forward in his hands. He was thinking of John as he had last seen him. He had stood there, where his vindicator stood now, defending himself from the charge that had been brought against him. How handsome and fearless the lad had looked. How they had loved one another, this father and son, until their lives had been darkened by this tragedy! And John was innocent after all, innocent, at least, of that one crowning cruelty of which he

had been accused. The thought brought with it the keenest gratitude; gratitude sorrowfully diluted with self-reproach. He had been so ready to believe in the boy's guilt! This last thought was uppermost when he at last lifted his head and spoke.

'And we made an Ishmaelite of him for a sin he did not commit! And I was bitterest of all in my denunciation of my own flesh and blood! And he had to bear the burden of that crime, knowing it was an injustice! Poor lad—poor lad! God forgive me my harshness! I shall never forgive myself. Is he living still? I wonder is he living still? I will move heaven and earth to find him—I will make reparation. Reparation?' He checked himself. 'For twenty-two years he has been a wanderer, with this terror hanging over him! . . .

And I talk of reparation! . . . What a price to pay for the sin of his youth! Twenty-two years! My poor boy!' He lifted his glance suddenly. 'How shall I ever thank you for what you have done for me?'

Mary shook her head gently, and they were silent again for a little; he busy with his regrets, she questioning within herself whether to go on or to hold her hand.

The house was very still. Through the open window came the moan of the tide and the whisper of the pines—indoors there was no sound whatever. Mary got up from her seat presently, and moved about the room a little—to one window, which looked straight into the dense shadow of the plantations, then to another which had a more open prospect, across the corner of the south slope to the head of

the bay. But she was not noting what lay outside the windows; she was too deeply occupied with what was going on within.

Irresolution was not an habitual failing with her; but to-night she was irresolute. She could not decide on her next step. Now she had begun should she go on, and tell the whole of her story? Just now, while he felt grateful for her vindication of John's character, he might the more easily forgive the duplicity of all these years. If she let this opportunity escape her, she might never have so favourable a one again. She turned and looked at Penhala. Should she do it now?

He was sitting back in a deep elbow chair, with his head supported on his hand. He was just beyond the circle of radiance thrown by the one reading lamp. 'Just

in the shadow,' she said, to herself, sorrowfully. About his whole pose there was an air of dejection altogether new in her experience of him. He was such a cheery-hearted man as a rule. Seeing him like that her heart misgave her, and she came to a decision at last. She would not make any further disclosures to-night. Her mind once made up, she thought it better to put herself beyond the reach of temptation.

'I suppose I had better not try to see Ellaline to-night,' she said, and moved towards the door.

'Ellaline?' he repeated, lifting his head quickly, his thoughts returning to the present state of affairs just as a bather returns to the surface, after a dive to the bottom. 'You are not going just yet? My dear soul, stay! This news of yours put Ella's affairs clean out of my head. I

wonder, if we find John, how—But we can discuss that later. My dear Mrs. Smith, come here and sit down. Is it possible that you have heard nothing of what has been going on here to-day.'

'I have heard nothing since Ellaline left me on Tregarron Head, yesterday morning,' answered Mary. 'Nothing whatever.'

'Did you know—I daresay you did, some of the servants knew all along—that Ellaline was not really my own daughter—that, in fact she is only an adopted child?'

It was Mary's turn to sit breathless now. What was coming next?'

'Well, that is so; though it has never been much talked about. On the subject of her parentage I have always been ignorant until this morning, when, without

a moment's warning, her father turned up and claimed her.'

Mary rose, aghast.

'Her father! Ella's father! What are you saying?'

'Yes; I don't wonder at your astonishment. The fellow turned up here this morning—forced his way into the dining-room while we were all at breakfast—half drunk, even at that time in the morning. A low, strolling blackguard, scarcely better than a common tramp. The sort of fellow the magistrates would commit to jail without hesitation, for being without visible means of support—a rogue and vagabond all through. He knocked Parsons out of the way and swaggered in among us, and asked for "his daughter—the girl who was passing as Mr. Penhala's daughter." Can you imagine the scene there was? Lady

Glenhaggart on the verge of hysterics, Pinto trying to get at the man's throat, little Ella—poor little Ella!—looking like a corpse, and showing fight for me through all her fright. Paul, who had heard the man's tale overnight, was the only one who kept his head. Well, it ended in her ladyship and her brood going off there and then: but Fitz has stood his ground like a man, and Ella and I are to start for town presently, and there is to be a run-away marriage, in the drawing-room at Eaton Square, to-morrow afternoon.'

'This is a dream! A nightmare!' cried Mary. 'Ella's father here, this morning, do you say? It is false! Her father died before she was born.'

Then Penhala too rose, and they stood looking at each other across the table.

'How do you know?' asked Penhala.

'What do you know of her parentage?'

'What do I know?' cried Mary, with a sobbing laugh, her caution and self-control coming to a sudden end. 'What do I know of Ellaline's parentage? I know this much —That I am her mother, and that her father, my husband, was your son—the son we have just been speaking about, the son who was falsely accused of the murder of Hagar Polwhele, the son who was killed in a burning house at Doncaster, six months before his child was born. What do I know!'

For perhaps a minute they stood, Mary sobbing in her throat, though there was no sign of tears in her wide, brilliant eyes; Penhala with his gaze reading her wild, strained face.

Then he took a step or two, and held out his hands entreatingly.

'It is true!' he muttered, brokenly. 'I can see it all! You came here on purpose! I see everything! My dear, you must try to forgive me the wrong I have done all these years to the memory of the dead. Rest your head there, my poor sorely-tried girl. Let me be a father to you, my dear; let us comfort one another, as far as we can, for all that has gone before. And our poor boy is dead—died bearing the burden of this cruel injustice—God help him!—and little Ella is my grand-daughter in very truth! I might have known it! I've been a poor, blind fool all through, my dear, but I hope you will bear with me, if only for Ella's sake.'

When at last Mary left Penhala alone in the library—avowedly to get an hour or two of sleep before his early start, though,

when she closed the door between them, he looked as little like sleep as she did—she did not attempt to go to bed. In her present condition the forced inaction would have driven her mad.

Everybody else in the house was long ago asleep, with the exception of Mrs. Quickly, who was dosing in a large chair in her own parlour. She would have considered she had neglected her duty, if she had not been at hand to see that the travellers got a comfortable breakfast before their early start.

Mary crept quietly to her room, and put on a woollen wrap and some noiseless slippers, and came out again, and began to pace the corridor outside Ellaline's door. At three o'clock she was going in to waken the girl, and tell her the sweet, beautiful secret that had lain locked up

in her heart all these long silent years.

Now that the emancipation of her mother's love was so close at hand, she began to wonder at her own past strength of mind; it struck her as something almost unnatural—that past patience of hers.

Looking back, from her present standpoint of exquisite anticipation, at all she had gone through in those years of silence—the unceasing guard and watchfulness on her tongue, that longed so constantly to put her mother's love into words, a guard all the more difficult to maintain because of the child's own impulsive affection, which was continually entrapping her into little half betrayals—looking back at it all, it seemed wonderful that she had ever come through the ordeal with her secret unspoken. Now that it was over, she felt to the full what it had cost her,

that unselfish silence of seventeen years; and there was a great, generous gladness pulsing at her heart, because she had been strong enough to make this sacrifice for her darling's good. But she would not have gone through those years of self-repression again—no, it did not seem to her she could—not again, now that her reward was so nearly within her reach—no, not for any bribe the world could offer her.

Flitting noiselessly about the silence of the great, dimly-lit corridors of the big house—for she was obliged every now and again to hurry away from the neighbourhood of Ellaline's room, because her passionate longing to hold the girl in her arms, to tell her all there was to tell, came upon her in such overpowering rushes, that she knew the heart hunger would be too much for

her if she stayed there, with the handle of the door within her reach. And had her love borne its imprisonment so bravely all these years, to break bounds now, within an hour of its deliverance?

So she took herself away to some of the distant corridors—coming back now and then for a glance at her darling's closed door—and occupied her time with trying to imagine how the child would take the news. She pictured the glad light that would spring into the scarcely opened eyes—surely she would be glad? Oh, surely, surely? To think otherwise caused her such acute agony, that she pushed the possibility from her as something too terrible to contemplate. She fancied the warm, brimming love of the girl's glance as the truth broke in on her understanding; the glad little cry, the quick, eager, outstretched

arms, the close, clinging, heart-whole kiss, all the rapture of the exquisite moment she went through in anticipation a dozen—twenty times, till she found the tears welling up for very happiness, and abused herself roundly for being so weak as to cry.

She spent some thought on the more prosaic part of the business too. She wondered a great deal on the subject of this sham father's individuality, and his motives.

If the approaching disclosure of her true relationship to Ellaline could have gained in gladness from any cause whatever, it would have done so from the circumstances under which it was to be made. This timely declaration of her identity would put an end, at once and for ever, to the pretensions of this make-believe father.

There was an added delight in this thought, it reassured her too, as to Ellaline's reception of her news. Not that she had any actual doubt on that point, only it was pleasant to think that, even from a worldly point of view, Ellaline would be likely to welcome the relationship—her 'Mamma Mary' as a mother would certainly be preferable to this sottish tramp as a father.

And so Mary thought her joyful thoughts, wandering noiselessly about the big, shadowy house in a happiness too intense for rest. And when, over the black line of the pines in the north-east, the twilight of the short summer night began to brighten into day, she took up her post at one of the windows on that side of the house, and watched the glad birth of the morning; watched the blue dawn pale shade by shade into gray, and

then brighten into an exquisite glow of softest, most translucent gold; which was not brighter nor more beautiful, she said to herself, than the glow of gladness at her heart.

And then the clock struck three, each stroke vibrating, as if with life, on the clear, perfect stillness of the morning air. Mary stood with happy eyes counting them. No, she would not be impatient now! She waited until the third stroke clanged out, and turned and ran, swiftly and silently, across the width of the house to Ellaline's room.

And then the stillness of the summer dawn was cleft by a wailing cry, a cry which brought every soul in the house wide awake at a breath, not because of its loudness, but because of its bitter anguish.

Mrs. Quickly was first on the scene; but even as she appeared the sound of hurrying feet was already echoing down the several stairways, and by the time Mr. Penhala found his way up from the distant library, there were a dozen frightened faces gathered round the open door of Ellaline's dressing-room.

He guessed in an instant at the truth, just as Mary had done. His glance had no sooner travelled from the prostrate figure at Mrs. Quickly's feet to the smooth, empty bed in the room beyond, than he knew all there was to know.

For form's sake he put a few questions, and learnt in reply that Ellaline had received a letter by hand, shortly after dinner, while she was superintending her packing; and had at once put on a hat and a cloak and gone out, leaving

the house by the drawing-room window.

Without the loss of a moment he ordered a horse to be saddled to carry a message to the station-master, for transmission to all the stations along the line; and sent the rest of the large household, men and women, searching the house inside and out, and the plantations around.

But he knew beforehand that that part of the search was waste of trouble, knew it from the start, knew it so well, that when the news came back, between five and six o'clock, that two people, answering to the description of Mr. Thomas Jones and Ellaline, had booked last night, by the ten fifteen train, from the little station at Cluth-hoe junction for Plymouth, he accepted the information without a remark.

He went down to the Carn Ruth station then, and sent off messages to Paul and Fitzwarrene to return at once; also to the heads of the police at Plymouth, Exeter and Bristol, hoping to stop the impudent kidnapper before he had got out of the west country. But he had an inward conviction all the time that his labour was so much waste of pains, that their only hope lay in Ellaline herself.

'But then,' as he pointed out to Mary —poor, white-faced, trembling Mary, who could rest nowhere, but spent the cruel hours wandering up and down the house, in and out of the rooms, almost as if she expected, even yet, to stumble across the missing girl quietly reading or sewing in some unexplored nook or corner—' but then, you see, Mary, the pity of it is, that the child still thinks he is her father, and

there is no knowing to what extent the scoundrel may play upon her sympathy, and filial duty, and all the rest of it. If you had only been at home when the blackguard made his claim, the imposition would have been exposed at once.'

Mary wrung her hands despairingly.

'You understand what kept me there, by that man's death-bed? My heart was set on clearing John's name. And for Ella's sake too——'

'My dear,' said Penhala, interrupting her tenderly, 'you don't think I was blaming you! God forbid that you should think such a thing as that! What I meant to say was, that it was such an unfortunate chance that you should have happened to be out of the way just that very day. Don't think that I'm ungrateful for the service you have rendered to my dead

boy's name. Your absence was one of those unlucky accidents that are always happening in this work-a-day world. It was to be, I suppose.'

Into Mary's tortured mind there leapt a sudden thought from out the dim past.

She remembered that when John—in the very earliest days of their acquaintance—had been regretting the loss of a packet of papers, because it prevented his carrying out a promise made to a dead friend, he had made use of the expression, 'It is all a part of the shadow that is on me.' The words flashed into her mind now. Without any thought or effort of her own they were there, vivid, almost audible.

'Part of the shadow!' Was this also 'a part of the shadow?' she asked herself sorrowfully, of the shadow that was on her poor dead love, that when she was using

her best efforts for his good, and the good of his child, it should end in harm for Ellaline, a harm of which nobody could yet see the extent or the end.

CHAPTER X.

PETROVSKY'S CHECK-MATE.

Paul and Fitz travelled down again the next day by the Cornish Express. Mr. Penhala's telegrams had routed them out of their beds before seven o'clock.

Fitz was in that condition, in speaking of which one can only use a very worn-out phrase, and say, 'It can be more easily imagined than described.'

To what pitch he would have worked himself up, if Penhala had informed him

that the man, Tom Jones, was no more the father of Ellaline than he was the 'Pope of Rome,' it is impossible to conceive. Even now, while ignorant of the imposture—for, in the telegrams, Penhala had not touched on Mary's disclosure—the only known thing in the world he bore any resemblance to, was a volcano in a state of active eruption.

Before starting from Paddington he had telegraphed, asking Penhala to wire the latest news to all the stations they stopped at on the way down.

Making the very best you can of it, it is a tremendous journey from London into the heart of Cornwall; eight good, solid hours of clatter, and shake, and roar in the close confinement of a railway carriage; but when to this is added the companionship of

a young man who shifts his seat about once in every five minutes, takes a sharp tramp up and down the carriage once in every ten, and varies the monotony in between whiles with sudden explosions of violent rage, directed against nobody in particular, and which therefore are as likely to be intended for the companion of his solitude as for anybody else, it will be easily understood that Petrovsky's return to his uncle's house was not made under the most pleasant circumstances in the world.

But Pinto's volcano-like condition seemed to have very little effect upon him. There were times during the journey when, for an hour at a stretch, he seemed absolutely unconscious of his impetuous fellow-traveller's presence. At these times

he sat with his face slightly turned to the window, his chin drooped on his chest, his features as immobile as if carved in granite.

If his face yesterday, during the scene with John Penhala, had looked like stone heated to incandescence, to-day it looked like stone that had gone through that white heat stage, and reached the calx state, as if all nourishment had been scorched out of his skin, burnt out by the consuming fire of his own furnace-like emotions.

The eyes looked still hot, the whites were bloodshot, the lids stretched and hideously wrinkled, the pupils contracted, restless, observant yet furtive, watching everything, yet seeing nothing; the eyes of one who had not known sleep for days —the eyes of one to whom sleep would

henceforth be an impossibility, for ever, and ever, and ever, the eyes of one already damned.

Sitting there, with his glance always directed through the window, away from his companion, that flickering of his eyes grew so unceasing, so perpetual, that the actual mechanism of the eye-ball must have ached with the incessant friction. But he was not conscious of the inconvenience, he was past the reach of any suffering merely physical.

The only times he roused up to any interest in his surroundings was when, as often as they stopped, Fitz made his desperate rushes to the telegraph offices. It was evident by his manner at these times, that his pre-occupation did not arise from indifference to passing events.

Poor, distraught Fitz was not more

eager than he for news of the missing girl. He was never a step behind when that impetuous fellow put his enquiries to the clerk in charge, he never lost a word of the clerk's answers.

No news at Swindon—their first stop—no news at Bristol, no news at Exeter, none at Plymouth.

The warm June afternoon was creeping on by this time, and Pinto's fresh, jolly young face was beginning to show signs of the stress and strain he was going through.

It was at this last place that Petrovsky made his first voluntary remark since the beginning of the journey.

'I suppose,' he said to the lad in charge of the telegraph office, 'you don't know of any accident having occurred on the line hereabouts, in the past night? No

body found on the rails, or anything of that sort?'

Pinto turned of a sickly greenish pallor as he heard, and when they were back in the carriage again—travelling more leisurely now that they were past the large towns—he asked Petrovsky what had made him put the question.

'You don't think that drunken brute has only taken her away to murder her, do you?'

But Petrovsky could give no explanation of his conduct. 'The idea had come into his head,' he said, 'and he had put it into words, that was all.'

But there came a time, when all this fume, and torment, and agony of mind were over, when Fitz recalled this curious question of the Russian's, and fitting it into its place, among other odds and ends

of words, and looks, and actions and half-breathed nothings, found a strange, ghastly significance in it.

Just now all he did, when this new and terrible suggestion was presented to him, was to drop his face forward in his hands with a moan of misery, and let it stop there. For the rest of the long ride Petrovsky himself was not stiller than he.

During the last hour or so of the journey a great mental change came over Petrovsky. His plan had miscarried—that was obvious; and with his life-long instincts for the advancement of the Cause all up in arms, he yet could not shut out of his mind the relief that came with the knowledge. Ellaline had escaped after all! As this belief strengthened momentarily, the horrible strain of the last twenty-

four hours relaxed. He lost his ghastly feeling of blood-guiltiness. He no longer stood on a plane apart from his kind. He became human again. And now it was once more possible to think of himself.

What if John had meant, from the beginning, only to place the girl in safety before proceeding to denounce him as her would-be murderer?

John could have but one motive for breaking faith with him—to rescue Ellaline from the danger which was threatening her. Very well; in following that course he knew the risk he was running; the consequences would fall on his own head.

As his sense of relief on Ellaline's account took form and colour in his mind, side by side with it there came into being a passionate hatred of John. While his heart could not restrain its gladness at

Ellaline's deliverance, it burnt with resentment against her deliverer. That this poor, hunted wretch, who, for the last twenty years and more had crept about the world, hiding himself under a hundred aliases, with the hangman's rope half round his neck—that such a one should, when tested, prove the better man of the two, roused in Paul's perverted mind the bitterest animosity.

As for the scheme for obtaining possession of the Penhala property, if John went the length of putting the girl on her guard against him, that was ruined irretrievably, past all restoring.

And the failure of this scheme meant his condemnation at the hands of his fellow-workers—as certainly as he knew that the sun would rise to-morrow morning, he

knew that he would be held responsible for the disclosure of the plot against Ellaline. Immense pressure had been brought to bear upon him in this matter; special expenses had been incurred, and a life most precious to the Nihilist community had been placed in deadly jeopardy, to give him the benefit of that interview in Leicester Square a few days ago.

And after all the trouble and risk and expense that had been gone to, to obtain for him the advice and instruction of one looked upon by his co-labourers as almost infallible, he had chosen to disregard the proffered counsel, to relegate the work entrusted to his hands to another, with the result which was to be expected—the miscarriage of the particular scheme in hand,

and the probable exposure of the secret mechanism of the confederation to the world at large.

Well, he had been false to his oath of obedience, and he must expect to pay the penalty. He did not rebel at that, not for an instant. Life with him had not been such a joyous undertaking, that its shortening, by a few years more or less, was a thing to be regretted. He should make no attempt to escape the punishment he had fairly earned. There was only one thing his gorge rose at—that the man who had wrecked his plans should get off without reaping in turn the full harvest of *his* treachery. For himself, he would not avoid his sentence, no matter what form it took, if he could ensure beforehand that the law would at last close its grip on John Penhala.

In all probability he, Petrovsky, was the only human being who knew the true identity of the wayside wizard, who had turned up in such a mysterious manner at Carn Ruth; and his one fear now was that the doom of the traitor, which might even now be dogging his steps, might overtake him before he could find an opportunity to pass this knowledge on to the quarter where it would bear fruit.

To-morrow he would return to London again. Unless, indeed, anything happened in the interim to lead to a change of plan. He would be in town again by to-morrow evening, and he would lose no time in imparting his information concerning John Penhala, to those who would take immediate action upon it. Afterwards—the end; the sooner the better.

When the two young men arrived at

Carn Ruth, they found that Mr. Penhala and Mrs. Smith were gone to Truro, having heard that a man and girl answering to the police description of the missing people had been seen there.

'They hoped to be back before the morning,' Parsons told them; 'at the latest, they would be back by noon-day to-morrow. And the gentlemen were to await their return; unless any likely news arrived from another quarter. In which case they were to use their own discretion about following it up at once.'

Telegraphic communication had been established with the head-quarters of half a dozen county constabularies, but the night passed away, and the morning came, without anything further being heard of the runaways.

Petrovsky passed the night pacing the

drive. Bed was out of the question for him, and he wanted to have the first pick of any news arriving. None came, however, and when Fitz came out to him in the early morning, he announced his intention of returning to town forthwith, and setting the London detective force to work.

He could not bear the monotony of this waiting, he said; he should go mad under the suspense, unless he were able to shake off thought in action.

Fitz looked at him in surprise, but said nothing. He was thinking of Petrovsky's manner during the journey yesterday, and wondering. This nephew of Mr. Penhala's had always been such a silent, secretive sort of chap, since Fitz had known anything of the Penhala household, that that good-natured young blunderer—who never troubled himself to look below the surface

of things, having hitherto been content to take the world as he found it—had set him down as 'one of those fellows born with the constitution of a jelly fish.' The idea that perhaps he had been mistaken in his estimation of the sallow-skinned Russian—more mistaken than he had ever been before in his life—flashed upon him now with such startling suddenness that it knocked the speech out of him, and left him looking at his companion in a silence which expressed more than he was aware of.

Could it be that this quiet, unsociable fellow, who had kept him so resolutely at arm's length that even his invincible good nature had been powerless to overcome his distant attitude—could it be that it was rather the strength of his feelings than the want of them that had produced that

curiously quiet bearing, that determined air of standing aloof from Pinto, and everybody connected with him?

Was this poor beggar in love with Ellaline? Was that the secret of it all? Fitz felt a twinge of compassion, and turned his face away from the other's. He would not let him see that his secret was suspected. Had he followed his own impulses he would have held out his hand and said,

'Is it like that with you, old man? Well, she can't care for both of us, and since she has the bad taste to prefer me, I know we've got your good wishes.'

But, blunt as his mental vision was in many respects, it was keen enough to show him that this was not an occasion for the bestowal of outspoken sympathy. It was one of those little incidents in

which goodness of heart stand one in as good stead as intellectual insight.

'Do you mean you will go back to London at once?' he said. 'Without waiting to see Mr. Penhala, or to hear what success they've had at Truro?'

'You can inform me of that by telegram,' Paul answered. 'It is only waste of time for me to remain here. In town I may be able to do some good. If news does turn up—which I don't expect—you will send it on to me at once? I shall stay at the Great Western for a day or two.'

Fitz gave the required promise, little foreseeing any obstacle in the way of its fulfilment, and Paul went into the house to make his arrangements for another early start.

Parsons, hearing of his intention, came to proffer his services.

'You'll lay yourself up, sir, that will be the end of it,' he observed, with the usual freedom of an old servant. 'It's madness to undertake such a journey as that three days running. You look worn to death already.'

Paul smiled and let that point pass.

'I was going to send for you,' he said. 'I want you to do me a favour, Parsons.'

'Well, that's a chance you don't often give to anyone, sir,' answered the old man. 'I shall be very pleased, I assure you.'

'It is this,' said Paul, going on busily with his packing as he spoke, 'I expect that when the news comes of Miss Ellaline's whereabouts, my uncle will be in

such a fever to get to her, that he will quite forget me and my anxiety; in fact, I could hardly expect him to remember me at such a time. But I shall be anxious, Parsons, almost as anxious as he himself.'

'Naturally enough, sir,' agreed Parsons. 'Nobody can know our young lady without loving her; God bless her! Of course you will want to hear, it would be strange if you didn't.'

'Well, then, this is what I want you to do for me the moment the news comes; I want you to find out where they are staying, Miss Ellaline and her father, and send word to me in town—to the Great Western. I am not going to Eaton Square—the hotel will be more convenient in every way. Understand me—I don't want you to plague and harass anybody on my

account with enquiries; just keep your ears open—when the news does come there will be no secret about it,—get hold of the name of the place, and send it on to me without loss of time. Will you do me this little service?'

'To be sure I will, sir!' returned Parsons, heartily, 'and I wish it was something more difficult.'

There was a curious touch of meaning in Petrovsky's manner as he answered,

'It may not seem much to you, but it is very important to me; let that comfort you, Parsons.'

Parsons made some polite rejoinder as he accepted the half-sovereign Paul held out to him, 'For the expense of the telegram.'

To his dying day, the good old man never knew how large a share that tele-

grain of his had in bringing about all that followed. It was as well. If we knew all the consequences which sometimes result from our most trifling actions, the intolerable burden of responsibility would render life an impossibility, to anybody possessed of either a heart or a conscience.

CHAPTER XI.

CLUTCHING AT STRAWS.

And John and Ellaline?

It was the third day of their companionship, and Ellaline still said to herself, at least once in the course of every waking hour, that the whole episode was a dream, a strange, pathetic dream, from which she would wake up presently, half glad, half sad to find it vanished.

There had been one really terrible ten minutes in this dream, and only one; when

she first discovered that she was to be taken away from Carn Ruth, whether she wished it or not. And this discovery she had made within an hour of their departure from Penhala's house.

He had not guessed how horribly frightened she was—she was too courageous to let him into that secret—but she had sat herself down plump on a heap of stones by the roadside, just before they reached the Cluth-hoe station, and defiantly stated her resolution not to stir an inch further, until Mr. Penhala's consent to her removal had been obtained.

'You enticed me out of reach of his protection with a lie,' she said, passionately. 'You told me my mother was in the neighbourhood. We have come miles. There is no mother. You have cheated me.'

He stood before her bareheaded, in the quiet country road, with a look on his face that made her half ashamed of her attack.

Quite alone in the world they seemed, those two.

Just across the dip of the valley, the signal lights of the little station showed against the blackness of the hill-side; from a long way off there came the faint ribbed echo of a departing train. All around them was solitude. He could have picked her up in his arms and taken her just where he would; all the same, it was he who pleaded and she who stormed.

In all his life he had never spoken a hard word nor laid a rough hand on a woman. He could not begin now. And with this special woman of all the world.

So the little creature scolded from her heap of stones, and he smiled entreatingly down at her, beating his leg with his shabby old cap as he listened.

And seeing that smile, and recognising its appeal—knowing all the time how powerless she would have been had he chosen to brow-beat her—her temper and her fright left her all at once.

'You have cheated me,' she said again, but with such an utter change of tone, that it no longer sounded like an accusation. 'Why did you tell me a lie?'

'I was desperate, little girl,' he answered. 'I was so badly frightened this afternoon —that's a disagreeable word for a man to have to use, but it is the only true one— so thoroughly frightened, that, like a drowning man, I put out my hand and

gripped the first floating straw. This scheme to entice you away from home was the first straw to hand—it promised to float me for a day or two, till I could get my head to the wind again, so I clutched at it. I might have gone away and left you, perhaps, but I wanted to look after you too, and you were in danger where you were.'

'Danger?' echoed Ellaline, finding it impossible to get down off her stilts all at once. 'The only danger that threatened me came from yourself. Danger? Nonsense! I can't think how you can be so cruel; after your promise of this morning too, not to interfere with me again. Do you never speak the truth?'

'Not often, indeed! But I am speaking it now. This morning, when I promised

to molest you no more, I did not know of the peril threatening you. Ah, little girl, believe me. Try to believe me. Have faith in me, and I swear to you, by whatever scrap of good there is left in me, that, beyond a little rough accommodation, no harm nor breath of harm shall come near you through me. Give me just a breathing time, a time in which to collect my plans, and, whoever else suffers, I promise you you shall not. You shall go back to your friends the worse in no degree for having trusted me.'

That conversation had taken place within an hour of her departure from Carn Ruth, and this was the third morning since, and in all those three strange, dream-like days, she had seen no reason yet to regret having trusted him.

As for him, he was in a maze, and he could not see his way out. He had forced his mind to the labour of planning their route from Cornwall to Sheffield, by such circuitous twists and turnings as would make the task of following them a matter of difficulty, and then he had rested on his oars, as it were.

They were both beyond Petrovsky's reach for a time; and he had nearly twenty sovereigns in his pocket; and this child and he—this child with Mary Fentimore's voice and smile, her very gestures and trick of speech—were, for this brief spell of delight, each the other's world. And the trees were just out in their young summer beauty, and the nightingales were singing of nights in a wooded Derbyshire vale that he knew of, and he would have one last little glimpse of sweetness and

light, one last deep draught of the delights of freedom, before the end came —the end which he felt drawing so near.

So Ellaline discarded the lace dinner-gown she had been wearing under her long cloak, in favour of a stuff skirt and cotton blouse, which she bought at one of the large Sheffield shops.

They went off by omnibus—a quaint conveyance, like a London 'bus, minus the tail half, and the remaining portion reduced to a third of its original size —a long afternoon's drive to a lovely, sleepy little village, that nestled quietly under one of the Derbyshire ranges; a retired nook where the buzz and hum of the world scarcely ever penetrated; and here, in the drowsy stillness of the

sheltered valley, he tried to form some plan or plans for the child's safety and his own.

But, as far as he himself was concerned, that discovery of Petrovsky's had thrown a mesh round him, from which no planning of his own could ever free him. That fact he recognised clearly. The barrier between himself and the past, which had grown up during these twenty-two years of complete severance—just as the underwood will grow over and obliterate a forest path that has fallen into desuetude—had been torn down at a touch, and he, John Smith, the strolling conjurer, was left exposed as John Penhala, the accepted murderer of Hagar Polwhele. Glance ahead in which direction he would, his own pathway was blocked by the one gruesome

probability—his arrest, his trial, and—the rest!

The evening they reached Chorthwats he sat in the garden for hours after tired little Ellaline had gone to bed. Such a lovely little bed-room she was sleeping in!—all sloping ceiling, and big dormer windows, and dimity and painted wood, and the odour of lavender about everything. A trout-stream was murmuring an accompaniment to the lullaby of the nightingales in the garden beneath, and long rose-boughs tapped entreatingly at the leaded casement, as the soft breeze swung them to and fro in the scented air. Such a picture of a room it was, such a room as you only see in books and—dreams. John sat below the rose-boughs and the window for hours that night,

puffing slowly at the first pipe he had smoked all day, and trying in vain 'to see his way through.'

Half-a-dozen different schemes he planned, but they all broke down on the one point—his own ultimate safety. If he put this child or her guardians on their guard against the designs of Petrovsky's crew, the other event would follow as surely as the night followed the day. And he was so horribly frightened of it! Sudden death he could have faced without a tremor; it was the thought of the long, dreary ceremonial of legal proceedings which unnerved him so deplorably. The trial, stretching out day after day, the lawyers' squabbles, the stirring into life again of the long forgotten past, the renewed humiliation and grief for his

father, his own exposure during the trial to the morbid curiosity of the public, his nightly return to the ghastly solitude of his cell, with the one end always in front of him—is it wonderful he flinched from it?

He fell asleep at last, in the very height of his troubled perplexity, and the good-natured landlady, coming out at closing time, found him there, and sent her husband out to awaken him, and bring him in out of the dew.

Sleep was a long time coming after he was in his room—that first nap had taken off the edge of his fatigue—but, late though he was awake, he was up and out again before the early household was astir in the morning. He had a sudden new love at his heart for the world and all

that was in it, he wanted to see all he could of it. He was growing miserly in the matter of time, and would not waste the precious hours in sleep. There would be plenty of time for rest by-and-by.

He took his quiet way through the still slumbering village street, and turned off over a stile, and through a chain of meadows, to the bosky enclosures of a gentleman's park; not a few paddocks and spinneys with a railing round them, but a real park, with vast solitudes in it—huge patches of woodland, which looked more like remnants of primeval forest than planted timber.

As he pushed his way across the open land to the shadow of the big trees, the dew fell in showers from the knee-high

grass. Away in the distance the outline of the hills rose against the horizon, like a fair fantasy of dip and curve and crested peak, looking as transparent, seen through the pellucid haze of the summer morn, as the atmosphere above them. All around him the birds were piping as they never pipe at any other hour in the twenty-four, and behind him the chimes of the church, striking the hour, blended solemnly with the gayer music. It seemed to him that there was a note of warning amid the melody of the bells, and the thought jarred on him. It was almost cruel just then, that warning of the flight of time!

In all his life nothing had ever looked so beautiful to him as that Derbyshire valley on that June morning.

As he gazed round and round, drinking in

the sweetness of scent and sight and sound, that strange pathetic sadness, which is an inherent part of true nature-worship, rose suddenly uppermost in his mind, and turned his rapture to pain. It was a foretaste of the 'sweet sorrow' of parting, he said to himself with a pang; and then put the fancy from him, and drew his thoughts back to the immediate proceedings in hand.

He would fetch the little girl out here. They would bring their breakfast in a basket, and eat it here, on a log in the wood, with the smell of last year's leaves blending with the perfume of the newly-burst honeysuckle. They would make holiday like two unequally-mated babes in the wood. And when the holiday was over they would go back to the work-a-day world again, and he would force him-

self to be prosaic, and matter-of-fact, and long-headed, and they would take serious counsel together as to their future proceedings.

He went back to the little inn under the big chestnut-tree—Longfellow might have had the tiny house in his mind's eye when he drew his village smithy—and sent a message up to Ellaline, to hasten out before the birds had finished their morning service of song; and packed with his own hands a dainty breakfast basket, milk and home-baked cakes, and fresh pulled green-stuff, and slices of shell-pink ham, and a few early strawberries—a very few, for June was not yet half-way through—all folded up in the whitest of damask.

He was waiting at the stair-foot when Ellaline came down. She clasped her hands when she saw him there, with the basket

on his arm. It was all part of this strange, wonderful dream of hers—this dream which would have been so beautiful, but for a curious little undercurrent of sorrow which ran through it all; an undercurrent which was perhaps caused by her knowledge of the anxiety her dear ones must be suffering on her account.

It was a delightful little feast they had out there, in the shadow of the stately forest trees, and not the least beautiful part was the lovely peace that surrounded them on all sides. The birds had finished their morning thanksgiving, and, except for an occasional twitter, the silence around them was absolute. So utterly still was it, that when a hare passed near them by-and-by, and, scenting their presence, scudded away through the loose crust of last year's leaves, they could hear the rustle of the

crisp fragments under her light tread for a long time after she was lost to view, trailing off fainter and fainter, till it was lost altogether in the heart of the wood.

The silence settled down again. Ellaline was curled up in the forked branch of a felled tree on the edge of the thicket, her companion sat bareheaded, with his back against it, a little lower down, with his fingers interlaced loosely below his knees, and his glance far away, on the hill line against the sky in the distance.

'I suppose,' he began, breaking the silence with a half-stifled sigh, 'I suppose everybody in this world has their own ideal Heaven.' Ellaline looked a little surprised. She had not thought it was a question admitting of a diversity of opinion. 'This is my ideal—peace, and rest from all strife and turmoil.'

Ellaline did not make any answer. It was not a subject she felt qualified to discuss.

He turned a little and smiled at her, and the smile was so exactly the bright, clear, candid smile of the happy boy, John Penhala, that if his father had seen him at that moment, with his own natural soul shining up through the coarse coating of these later years, he must inevitably have recognised him. The self-restraint he had practised during these three days of companionship with this pure-minded child, had already worked this change in him. So fatally plastic his nature remained, even yet.

Ellaline answered the smile at once. Her heart always warmed towards her father when he smiled.

'And there really is a touch of paradise

about this little excursion,' he went on; 'even to the lamb lying down with the lion—or the leopard, is it?'

'Does that mean you and me?' asked Ellaline, with a touch of wistfulness in her look—she did not play off her little tyrannies upon him, as of old upon Mr. Penhala. 'It is not a happy simile, dear. I'm afraid there is not much of the typical lamb about me, and there is still less of the lion about you.'

'I should have thought I was sufficiently terrible though, to a child brought up as you have been, *à la princesse*,' he said, still smiling. 'It is not many delicately-brought-up girls who would so soon have overcome their natural shrinking from a man who came with my introductions. It still strikes me with a sort of wonder, little girl,

as often as I think of it—your confidence in me.'

'Is it so wonderful, then—confidence between father and child?'

A shadow dimmed the quiet gladness of his glance for a moment.

'Then if I were to say to you now—this moment—that I had been deceiving you all this time, that I was not your father, you would no longer have any confidence in me?'

She laughed a tender little laugh as she gave her answer.

'I should not believe you if you said such a thing as that. If you were not my father we should not have learnt to love each other in three days, as we have done. But, in any case, I am sure I should never be afraid of you now, if that is what you

mean.' She put her hand on his hair, and smoothed it gently. 'Such pretty hair,' she said, 'in spite of the many, many white threads. Not my father, indeed! Why, that nice little woman down at the inn said I was the very moral of you—whatever that may mean. I think you must have been a very charming-looking young man, father.' She laughed a little again. 'What shameless vanity to put those two observations after one another like that!'

He was examining her face curiously. Was that the touch of familiarity that had struck him in her features that first day on the race-course: the resemblance to his own? There was a likeness, of a kind. How strangely these things fell out! It was odd that, though he attached no importance to the discovery of this likeness, it checked his intention to tell her the

truth concerning the imposture. He had meant to tell her the whole thing this morning, now he made up his mind to wait. He would make a free confession when her friends came to take her home; until then he would leave her under her present peaceful delusion.

He caught her hand presently, as it travelled softly over his head, and kissed it gently, and put it back on her own knee. She had noticed before how carefully he resisted any of her small attempts at a closer familiarity.

'I am going to talk business now,' he said; 'and I can't talk sensibly with your finger-tips so near to my thinking apparatus. You have been very good and patient, and now you are to have your reward. You shall communicate with your friends by to-night's post.'

A brighter light flashed into her eyes.

'How do you think it would answer if we were to ask Mr. Pinto to come along here, with that special license in his pocket?'

'How did you know about that?' she cried. But he only smiled at her blushes, and shook his head.

'You forget, I am a magician,' he said, gaily. 'What do you say? Shall we have a wedding here, in that quiet little gray stone church? I should feel much more contented about you, if I once saw you safe under that manly young fellow's protection.'

'If I may have my own choice,' she said, with a touch of shyness in her manner, 'I would rather have my dear Mrs. Smith come to me, than anybody.'

'That is your old governess?'

'And my adopted mother.'

'Personally, I would rather hand you over to Pinto. A woman is not much good when there is real danger about.'

'Danger?' she echoed, looking a little roused. 'Protection? Danger? What danger are you hinting at? Before you brought me away from Cornwall, everybody said my only danger came from you—the fear of you carrying me off. Now you have got me away, you say it was to save me from danger that you did it, and that there is danger in my return!'

'Oh, well, that is rather a big name to give it,' he said, not seeing how any good was to be gained by alarming her, and deciding to reserve his warning for those who took her out of his charge. 'The fact is merely this—I got hold of some

knowledge, before we left Cornwall, which made me think Paul Petrovsky was not very well disposed towards you; and I think your friends should be warned, before you meet him again, that he is no friend of yours.'

'What—Paul? Oh, poor Paul! I think there must be a mistake somewhere, because—I don't like to talk about it, but I think you ought to know. Poor Paul liked me only too well. He asked me to marry him.'

'Asked you to marry him?' This information rather took his breath away. What had been the motive of the proposal? Had the monster meant to poison his young wife after marriage? Or was it done merely to divert suspicion from himself? 'Well,' he said, 'we will agree to think that

I have made a mistake, but I shall ask you to let me have my own way so far as this—that you don't, when you leave me, travel back with only Mrs. Smith for a companion. You shall have Mrs. Smith if you like, but let me send word to Pinto, also, where you are to be found.'

'That you shall do as you will about.'

'And—one thing more while we are discussing business. When you write to your friend, will you impress upon her the necessity of keeping your whereabouts a secret from Petrovsky? On no account must she let him know she is coming to you. You think I am making a mystery out of nothing, I can see. Well, then, I must let you into a little secret of my own. Whether Petrovsky is your enemy or not, he certainly is mine, and I want to return

you into your friend's hands, and get away again—out of the country, if possible—before he finds out where I am. He holds a secret of mine, a dangerous secret, which he will expose without the slightest compunction, when he hears that you are returning to his uncle's house.'

She drew her breath in swiftly, and leant over towards him to look into his face.

'Of course!' she said, 'I might have known there was something of that sort. How else is it possible to understand this life of yours? On the race-courses—among such—oh, it must be terrible for you sometimes. For you who love all that is good and beautiful. Oh, I know! I have seen the pain and the longing for some-

thing different in your eyes. I saw it last night, when we were in the garden listening to the choir practising in the church, and I saw it just now, when you were looking at the hills over there. To lead the life you have led must have been torment unspeakable sometimes.'

'I would not go back to it,' he burst out, and stopped, and went on again more quietly, 'yes, I would rather finish my life now, and have done with it, than go back to the old tread-mill, that old existence of which I cannot even speak to you, or such as you, little girl.'

'But you will not do that,' she said.

He only smiled and shook his head a little, not looking at her, and something in the smile, its endurance, its hopelessness, stormed her tender heart with a swift

rush of pity and love. She slipped from her perch to the ground at his side, and put an arm half timidly round his neck.

'Dear father,' she whispered, 'let me give up that other plan and come with you, wherever it is you are going. Fitz and I are young, we can spare some time to you. Now that we have found one another, let us stay together for a time. I will try to make your life happier than it has been. And for the poverty—well, we will bear it together, dear. Let us go away, abroad, and be a comfort to each other; somewhere where this unhappy secret of yours will no longer have the power to overshadow your life. They—those dear people who have loved me so well all my life—had a name for me—Miss Sunshine. Let me try to be your

sunshine, dear. Don't send me from you when you need me so badly.'

Such a look came over him as he listened, as paid her there and then for the unselfishness of the offer. He held her off and looked at her, with a light in his eyes, and a quiver about his lips, as if the joy and gladness at his heart were more than he could contain. Perhaps, for the space of five seconds, there may have been some mad thought in his mind of accepting the proposal, but it came and went like a flash of summer lightning athwart the evening sky, and left as little sign or token behind it.

That, indeed, would have been to crown his record of crime with foul dishonour.

But for a breath the temptation was there, pulsing through his veins, dazzling him by its radiance. Then he drew her

to him, and laid his first and last kiss on her sweet, pure young lips.

'God bless you for the offer, little girl,' he said, with a something akin to reverence in his manner, 'but such comfort as that is not for me.'

He put her quietly from him, and got up and walked away a little distance, and stood with his back towards her, with his eyes once more fixed on the evanescent purple of the distant hills. He was steadied again when he faced round.

'Come,' he said, 'let us get back and write those letters. The post is sure to leave this out-of-the-way place at some unearthly hour.'

How could Ellaline help an inward flutter of gladness as she heard? But she had meant every word of her offer when

she made it, and all her life long she was glad that she had made it; glad, too, that she had made it from her heart, in perfect sincerity.

And so they passed together, out of the shadow of the chestnuts into the brilliance of the summer noon, and took their way back to the village.

There was music going on again inside the church, and they paused for a moment in the shelter of the lych-gate to listen. His glance went wandering over the neatly-kept graves.

'A veritable "garden of sleep,"' he said. 'I should scarcely think the people buried here ever turn in their graves—they lie too quietly. I should think one could hardly help but rest here, with the little birds above you, telling one another their

love-stories all the day long, and the river there, singing your lullaby all through the darkness. A "garden of sleep" indeed!'

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN SEES A WAY THROUGH.

They had carefully calculated the earliest moment at which Mrs. Smith and Fitz could reach Chorthwats. Providing they started by the first train leaving Carn Ruth after the receipt of Ellaline's letters, and travelled by the quickest and most direct route available, as Ellaline knew they would do, they should reach Chorthwats between three and four in the afternoon.

John had mapped out his plans with the nicest exactitude.

He meant, first and foremost, to avoid the pain of a farewell scene with Ellaline. It would only increase his heart-ache, and God knew that was unnecessary.

He had written a letter to leave behind for Pinto, containing a full and careful account of the compact between himself and Petrovsky—the removal of Ellaline on his side, for the preservation of his secret on Petrovsky's. In proof of his statement, he asked Mr. Pinto to trace the twenty-pound-note, which he had changed at the Cluth-hoe station, backwards to Petrovsky's possession. That would establish the fact that he had provided funds for Ellaline's abduction. He also enclosed the globule he had received from the Russian to administer to Ellaline.

'Have it analysed,' he wrote, 'and judge of his motives from the analyst's report. And bear this one point emphatically in mind—that in disclosing this scheme to you, I am actuated by one motive only, the preservation of Miss Ellaline's life. There is no touch of spite against Petrovsky in my mind, I am only anxious to put you on your guard against him. Before you condemn me too severely for the part I have played in this business, I would have you call to mind that my main object in carrying the young lady off, was to remove her for a time—till I could look about me and make preparations for my own escape—from the dangerous neighbourhood of Petrovsky. If I had defied him there, in Cornwall, my doom was sealed. From here I shall have a better chance, not much perhaps, still, it is not quite so hopeless

as the other. One request I would make on my own part. If you can at all reconcile it to your notions of what is due to your future wife, I would ask you not to betray to her the fact of my imposture—let her think of me as her father till the end of the chapter. Blackguard as I am, I have a grain of sentiment left in me somewhere, and it would be a great pleasure for me to know that now and then, in the pauses of her happy life, she still gave a kind thought to me.'

This letter, written and carefully sealed, with the tiny box enclosed, he consigned it to his innermost pocket. He would hand it over to the landlady at the last moment before his departure, when he had seen little Miss Sunshine safe in the presence of her friends.

He had planned to walk into Sheffield,

and get down to Hull on board one of the cargo-barges; from thence to ship across to Antwerp or Holland, and from there to work his passage on board one of the big steamers to America or Australia. If he was once out of England he would have no further fear of Petrovsky. His great terror was that he might be pounced on here—before he could make a bid for liberty.

Ellaline had read to him the letter she wrote to Mrs. Smith, and he knew that, in the face of what the child had said there, her friends were not likely to let Petrovsky into the secret of her present whereabouts. He told himself, again and again, that the danger from the Russian was not a pressing danger; that, for at least a day or two, he was safe from the threatened revenge of the man whom he had tricked all round; and yet he could not shake

off a haunting sense of insecurity. It was natural, considering the matter at stake.

As the time drew near for the arrival of Mrs. Smith and Pinto, he made a pretence of going for a walk, and went and hid himself in a leafy bower at the bottom of the garden, from whence, through the foliage, himself unseen, he could keep a watch on the front of the house.

In the landlady's best upstairs sitting-room—lent for the occasion—Ellaline was waiting. She was in such a curious condition of mind, that she could not make out whether the tears, which would brim over every now and again, proceeded from overwhelming rapture at the prospect of the meeting at hand, or heart-breaking grief at the separation from her father,

which was to follow it. Even now she tried to hope that, when they were all together, she and Fitz and Mamma Mary, they might succeed in persuading this dear, tardily-found father of hers to alter his mind; so far at least as not to separate himself from them in the wholesale fashion he contemplated.

John was not smoking out there in the arbour. His tribulation was beyond the reach of the habitual soother. He sat on the bench with his elbows on his knees, and his chin on his hands; his glance for the most part of the time resting on the open meads, across the brawling little river at his feet. It was not until he heard signs of movement that he turned his eyes to the doorway of the inn.

It was but an interrupted view he got

of the front of the house, through the foliage of the garden hedge, but he needed no sight of Pinto when he arrived. He heard his big, jolly young voice before the carriage stopped, and the very sound brought him a feeling of comfort. The little girl could not come to harm in the care of this muscular young hero.

He took as good a view as he could of the new arrivals. He could not see much of the governess, she went into the inn on Pinto's other arm. She was veiled too; but he caught a glimpse of what looked, through the gray gauze travelling veil, like masses of very fair hair, and he turned his glance back to the meadows across the stream, with a foolish pang of disappointment at his heart.

What, then? Had he really expected

there was anything in the coincidence of names, and of such a name of Smith? Assuredly he was drifting into his second childhood.

Well, there was nothing to keep him any longer. His charge was safe in the hands of her proper protectors; and he had a long, hot walk before him; the sooner he started the better. He would give the letter for Pinto into the landlady's keeping and slip quietly away, while those people upstairs were still busy with their happy greetings, too much occupied with their own gladness to enquire after him, or give a thought in his direction.

Yes; in his own mind he was quite decided that he ought to get away at once; and yet he still sat on, more from a positive disinclination to break the exquisite

stillness surrounding him, than from any vacillation, any touch of irresolution in his purpose. He made a little effort at last, and felt for the letter in his pocket, and rose, and took his cap off the bench, and stood back in the shadow for a moment, to watch a trout lying under the opposite bank of the little river.

With that curious trick of busying itself with trifles, so common to the brain at moments of supreme emotion, his mind began to occupy itself with the probable weight of the fish—to half an ounce he tried to decide it—and the circumstances of its capture; whether it would be hooked this season or survive until next, whether it would fall a prey to the untutored skill of one of the village lads, or rejoice the heart of some London angler, armed with

all the latest appliances of the gentle art.

He wondered a little to see the fish lie there, under the bare bank, when he could have found plenty of shadow from the bushes a few yards either up or down the stream. Perhaps the creature was the victim of his own greediness; possibly he had dined, not wisely but too well, off the May fly, just now at the height of its swarming, and felt as disinclined for action as the traditional alderman after a civic feast.

All the same though, *malgré* repletion, John knew that the moment he moved out of the gloom of the arbour into the sunlight, there would be a whisk of a handsome speckled body, a flash of a silvern tail, and Mr. Trout would have re-

nounced his policy of masterly inactivity, and taken up a fresh and less assailable position, under the shelter of the bushes lower down.

As he stood there, motionless as a statue, meaning every instant to move, and yet standing on, the silence of the road beyond the high thorn hedge was once more broken. This time not by wheels, but by voices. The knowledge that the speakers were strangers drifted hazily through his sense of hearing into his understanding. There was no trace of the local accent in their speech. The next thing his ears told him was that they were Londoners; and the next, that one of them was Petrovsky!

A sudden darkness closed him in round about, and his muscles lost the power to hold him upright.

He dropped back on to the bench, and held his breath.

'This must be the place. Now mind, I don't want the young lady scared if you can possibly manage without it. Get your man away from the house, if you can, before you disclose your business. And when you have once got him away, keep him away. He can have my seat in the trap back to Sheffield. I will be there to-morrow morning to swear the information before the magistrate, and the rest will be plain sailing.'

'Why not come back with us, governor?'

'Because I expect the young lady will be left here alone, and I will stay with her until the arrival of her friends. In any case, I shall spend the night here.'

They were at the door now; three of them. And now the landlady was talking to them, in the shadow of the plumy chestnut-tree.

'Yes; she had a lady and a gentleman staying in the house.—The gentleman was out.—The lady was upstairs.—No; she was not alone; some friends had just arrived from Cornwall.'

As this answer is given, the listener in the arbour almost imagines he sees the sudden cloud of a thwarted purpose darken the questioner's face.

'The young lady's father was out walking, had been out this last half-hour. No, she was not sure which way he had gone. Very likely he was in the churchyard; he had a trick of strolling in there. No, of course he had not seen the people from

Cornwall yet. It was scarce ten minutes since they had arrived. Something to eat, did they want? She could only offer them eggs and bacon, she had no butcher's meat in the house, excepting the chops that had been ordered for the upstairs tea. Yes, they could have what they wanted out there on the bench if they liked, it was all one to her.'

And so saying she bustled away and left them there, clustered round the porch in patient waiting.

Presently, when the clang of a closing door, somewhere at the back of the house, came echoing out across the afternoon stillness, the three men drew closer together, and began to talk. So quietly was the conversation carried on, that at first the listener in the arbour could hear no-

thing. But, after a little, one of them moved out a step or two from the house, to look up and down the solitary stretch of country road; the front of the house, too, he swept with a searching glance, but there were no open windows, and his next few sentences were spoken in a less cautious voice.

'That was a good idea of yours, Jim, having the grub out here. We will go and meet our man as soon as he's in sight —prevent his coming near the house at all. You'll stay and settle with the landlady, Mr. Petrovsky. Just identify the gentleman, and leave the rest to us. We shall do the job better by ourselves.'

As John listened, the darkness that had fallen on him began to clear. As his eyesight came back to him, the first thing he

saw was the trout lying under the opposite bank. It was with a shock of wonder he realised that barely ten minutes had passed since he first saw the creature there. To him it seemed that ages had gone by while he crouched there in the arbour shade.

The voices on the other side of the hedge were still making themselves heard, but as his mind recovered its balance, it obeyed the first great law of nature, and busied itself, to the exclusion of everything else, with the problem of his self-preservation.

He could get away, even now! Even now, while those blood-hounds were on the other side of the hedge watching for him, he could leap the river at his feet, steal along the opposite hedge-rows, till

he was beyond range from the inn windows, and then strike out, across the Peak uplands, for the little station of Chapel-en-le-Frith. Once in touch with the Midland system, and he could ride into Manchester, and from thence on to Liverpool, almost before those fools had grown tired of watching for his coming on the sunny road before the inn. They had their eye on Sheffield, therefore Sheffield was out of the question; the Hull and Antwerp route must be thrown over, but the other was almost as good, perhaps even better.

From here to Chapel-en-le-Frith, by bee-line across the Peak district, it was scarcely more than five miles—he could tramp it in an hour-and-a-quarter, he would be in Liverpool to-night, and, with

common luck in catching a boat, he might be *en route* for New York before mid-day to-morrow.

All the fight in him was up in arms. It was a match between his wits and those others'. At the prospect his spirits rose at a bound; there was still a chance for him if he had the courage to take it; his manhood leapt up within him at the call, and stood alert and ready to answer to whatever demand his reason should make of it.

Instinctively and noiselessly he crammed his soft cap well down on his head, loosened his flowing neck-tie, and tightened his belt by a couple of holes. He *might* have to run for it, and it was as well to be ready for all emergencies.

He rose stealthily and stood a moment, to steady himself for the run down the bank,

and the leap to the other side. He drew a big breath and set his elbows well into his sides, and then, at a touch, his arms dropped limp from his shoulders, and his muscles, braced for the effort, fell back into the laxity of inaction.

Under the pressure of his elbow a paper in his pocket had crackled. His letter to Pinto! The letter warning him against the Russian!

His thoughts, hitherto absorbed in planning his own safety, flew off at a tangent.

Ellaline! Sweet, lovely, loving little Ellaline! Ellaline, who had offered to give up the spring-time of her life to him!

And he had dreamt for a few moments of leaving her there, at Petrovsky's mercy, without delivering his message of warning!

And yet, if he waited to deliver it, what would happen? He set his teeth hard, and drew in a quick, hissing breath. Already, in anticipation, he was enduring the long drawn-out agony of a trial for murder, the misery of the succeeding solitude, the horror of the final *dénoûment.*

Should he go, then? Make his escape while yet there was time, and leave the lovable child to her fate?

And what if Petrovsky had another of those innocent-looking pilules in his pocket? And what if he joined that happy party upstairs, in the landlady's lavender-scented parlour? And what if he sat next the tea-tray and—*passed the cups?*

There was nothing improbable in such an arrangement! Nor was it improbable

that such an arrangement would result in the immediate removal of the obstacle, which stood between Petrovsky and his uncle's wealth—the wealth which he was pledged to obtain, regardless of ways and means.

That was what would happen if John took his chance now, on the spot. While, if he waited——

Standing there in the hot June afternoon he shivered, shivered like a lady's terrier on a frosty day.

Did it come to this then—that it was his life or the child's? The child's life or his?

Was there no alternative but that? None?

And hers promised to be such a happy life, and it was all before her; while his—

what had it ever been these past twenty years? What, under the most favourable circumstances, was it ever likely to be, that he should buy it at such a price? What was it really worth to him?

Ah, but it was not his life he was fighting for, it was the dread of death, of that especial form of death, which was urging him to escape. If death could come to him in a less terrible manner, he would meet it like a man. But the death of a murderer? Could he face that?

His life or the child's? The child's life or his? But at least the manner of *her* death would be free from all pain or horror, while *his*——!

His thoughts came to a sudden halt, and sped on again, and his right hand rose instinctively to the pocket where Pinto's

letter lay; Pinto's letter, with its enclosure!

He saw his way through at last!

For Ellaline, life; for himself, escape—swift, easy, and painless, and a quarter of an hour still at his command, in which to strip Petrovsky of his power for future harm.

Now that he at last saw a way out of his difficulties, and knew himself possessed of the means to accomplish it, a great wave of the love of life—life at any price, life under any circumstances—came down on him, and tossed him hither and hither, in the throes of a stupendous struggle. Stupendous while it lasted, but soon over.

In those few moments of his past misspent life when he had dared to think, he had often wondered why such a wasted life

as his had ever been begun. And here, at last, he was offered a chance of justifying his existence. The last act of his life was to be the best act. And all dread of the great secret dropped from him at the thought, and left him calm, and still and peaceful. He had never done so well as he was doing now, in putting this child's life before his own.

The next moment, as he moved out into the sunlight, his shadow fell on the over-fed trout, who darted away up-stream at a rate of two or three hundred miles an hour, to the shelter of the osiers higher up. As he stole across the lawn to the little garden door, John gave a thought to him. By the time that trout met with his own especial hook, where and how and what would *he* be ?

It was a queer idea to come into his mind; but his mind was in a condition to receive queer ideas. Already the every-day world seemed a long way behind him.

As he crossed the shadowy little passage and crept up the stairs, the voices of the men on the bench under the chestnut-tree drifted in to him. Only half a dozen words he heard. Ten minutes ago they would have sent a chill horror through him, now he smiled, with the air of one who enjoys a secret all to himself.

'Oh, yes; it will be a sure swinging job,' said the voice.

John paused a little at the stairhead and listened. The tone of certainty in which his capture was being discussed, touched his sense of humour. After all, it was he

who would have the last laugh. As he stood there he broke the fastening of his letter to Pinto, and took out the little enclosure, and, holding it in one hand, and putting the letter back in his pocket with the other, he moved up the dim passage towards the upper end.

When he reached the parlour door he stopped to open the small box; but the lid stuck; and in the momentary lull of movement, he caught the ring of a voice on the other side of the door. Unconsciously his fingers relaxed their hold, and the box rolled away unopened.

Without a sound, with no betrayal of emotion except for the light in his eyes, he turned the handle and strode straight into the middle of the pretty, low-ceiled parlour.

He stood there a space, with the afternoon radiance full upon him, and with such a light on his face, such a look of dazed wonder, that Ellaline and Pinto waited speechlessly for what was to happen next.

The ladies were on a couch in a dark corner, but they both rose at John's swift entrance, and then somebody in the room spoke his name.

'John!'

It was scarcely more than a whisper, but a whisper of such an intense, penetrant quality, that it flashed through the room like a lightning gleam, and left behind it a still, breathless hush of expectancy.

A hush full of the most supreme emotion—joy, fear, anguish, gladness, what was it?

Mary paused, steadying herself with one hand on the couch, the other hand, close shut, held hard to her bosom.

'John!' she whispered again. 'John! Not dead? Not dead?'

John looked like a corpse, all but his eyes, they burnt and glowed with a light wonderful to look upon.

'It *is* you!' he said. 'It is Mary! I am glad! God of heaven, how glad I am! To think that we should meet at last, and —now. You will shake hands with me?'

'Not dead!' she said again. 'Not dead all these weary, wasted years? Oh, my love, God has been very cruel to us.'

He went over to her—they neither of them had eyes nor thought for anything but each other—and held out his hand.

'No; not dead! Did you think it?'

They stood, hand in hand, devouring one another with the eagerness of an affection that had never failed.

'I was told it!' she whispered, her faithful, sorrowing eyes fixed on his. 'I was told you were killed in the burning house. Else why should I not have searched you out?'

A change came over him; some of the keen gladness faded from his glance, some of the warmth from his smile.

'You have forgotten—it is so long ago—you must remember, there were reasons why we should keep apart.'

'No,' she said, breathless still; 'no, I know of no reason. None whatever!'

'Your letter,' he said, quietly. 'Surely

you remember the reason you gave in the letter you left behind? I have it still—no; I forgot! I lost it only a day or two ago. But I know the very words. Don't you recollect speaking of a new love that had come into your life?'

'Ah!'

Memory came with a rush and shock that staggered her. She took her hand from the couch to clasp it with the other on his. Tight, tight she strained them against her heart, as if to still its mad throbbing.

'That new love—did you not understand? The love of a mother for her unborn child—our child, John—yours and mine—this child.'

She held a hand out gropingly to Ella, and drew her to her side; she did not seem

able to move her gaze from the face of the man before her.

He swayed a little, and lifted his eyes to look across his wife's shoulder to where Pinto stood—the embodiment of mute amazement.

'Our child?' he muttered, as his glance came back to hers and Ellaline's, now close together. 'Ours? Mine? Yours and mine?'

'You thought—*that?* That I had left you for such a reason as that——'

'Stop!' he cried, suddenly. 'Tell me the real history of your disappearance?'

Without a moment's hesitation, she obeyed him.

'Morelli showed me a marriage certificate with your name on it. I thought—only for the time, I found out the truth

afterwards—I thought our marriage was bigamous——'

He broke into her explanations with a loud laugh, and took his hand from her clasp, and glanced again at Pinto.

'And there are those who deny the punishment of sin!' he cried. 'Tell them my story, and dare them to deny any longer. I started my downhill course by cheating a girl into a sham marriage; and I have been cheated out of my life's happiness by an unfounded suspicion of the same crime. God's own justice!' He dropped his voice, and his face grew still, as at a touch of solemn thought. 'My punishment has reached me here,' he said, 'so much the more will I hope for peace in the long, long to-come.'

Mary threw a look towards Fitz, and he

came at once, and took the sobbing Ella-line from her, and moved towards the door. John held out his hand as they went.

'Kiss me, little daughter!' he said, and to her aching heart it seemed as if all the lost tenderness of those wasted years, was crowded into that one use of the title. 'Kiss me once! A full, free kiss! Stay!' he cried again, before they reached the door, 'this letter, Mr. Pinto—read it. Keep her held close to you till you have read it. Then guard her as you best know how.'

He turned then to Mary, and put his arms round her, and she laid her gentle head on his breast.

'It is worth all to know this,' he said, softly, 'that you were always what I

thought you. You will think of me now and then—you and the child?'

She thought he was alluding to a renewed separation.

'How shall I tell you?' she murmured. 'The joy of it will choke me. I would not speak of it before Ella. There is no longer any need to hide yourself. Your name is cleared of that old shame, John, my dear. Edyvean has confessed that his evidence at the coroner's inquest was false—made a written confession that Hagar Polwhele's death was accidental, that you had no share in bringing it about.'

He lurched sideways and put a hand to his throat; with the other he held on to her shoulder, as if to save himself from falling.

'Hush!' he said. 'Hush! I—it is too

much, it—it can't be! Hush! Don't speak! Let me steady myself.'

She waited, trembling. He swung again as if he felt the floor swaying under his feet. His unconscious grip on her shoulder was like a vice, but the pain never reached her senses till after. She stood firm, and held him.

'Twenty years!' The words came roughened and hoarse, deep, deep in his throat. 'Twenty years of darkness . . . and now, sudden light! . . . It is like blindness . . . It can't be true! it can't be! . . . God! if it's a lie!'

The anguish of this was so awful that she could not keep silent.

'It is heaven's own truth, John! Heaven's own truth!'

'Heaven's own truth!' he echoed, brokenly. 'Heaven's own truth!'

Repeating the words, as if they held some curious power, he grew calmer, and walked over to the window, and stood looking at the garden below, murmuring softly, 'Heaven's own truth, Heaven's own truth,' over and over again, continuously.

He seemed to lose himself there, until, presently, Mary moved. He turned at once. The sight of her recalled his wandering thoughts. He went and put her in a chair, and fell at her feet, and drooped his head on her knee.

'Twenty years!' he muttered; 'a long sentence—a heavy atonement! Will it suffice? Is my crime to be wiped out at last?

Mary laid a tender touch on the gleaming silver of his hair.

'At last,' she said, softly. 'At last, my love!'

L'ENVOI.

The moment he heard the story Mary had to tell, Petrovsky recognised the thoroughness of his defeat, and made his retreat without loss of time.

John yielded himself up to the authorities, and won his way back to a recognised position among his fellows, through the ordeal of a public enquiry.

His clean-handedness, in this actual matter of the murder, being established beyond all doubt, to the satisfaction of the world at large, that discriminating congeries of intellects decided that the other

counts against him mattered not at all. Perhaps, to be more exact, they decided that his youthful iniquities had been more than atoned for, by the loss of his name and position for the best twenty years of his life. The result in any case was the same. They welcomed his return to his rightful place among them with unreserved heartiness.

Lady Glenhaggart even conceived the scheme of making a lion of him, and settled in her own mind that 'his first appearances since his resuscitation,' should be made at a series of receptions, given by her in his honour. But when the plan was proposed to him, he nearly fainted with horror.

He satisfied himself, at the time, with a very outspoken refusal, but the suggestion frightened him badly, and he never knew

another really peaceful moment till Ella-line's marriage was an accomplished fact, and he was safely out of the way, with his wife and father, in a quiet, retired little nook in the Austrian Tyrol.

In the autumn, when they went back to the House of Penhala, there was bound to be some sort of 'homeing,' but they got through it as quietly as was possible, and settled down at once into the gentle, pleasant, domestic life, which came so enjoyably to them after the tempestuous tossings of the past.

Petrovsky made a good finish. He was killed while fighting the police, in defence of a secret Nihilistic printing-office in St. Petersburg It was the death he would have chosen, short of the supreme honour of suffering a public execution for the good of The Cause.

John read the news in his morning paper, which reached Carn Ruth in the evening, as he and his father sat over their claret one warm night in August.

He went over the paragraph again aloud, and they talked for a few minutes of the man who was gone.

Then there fell a silence, as each thought his own thoughts, to the accompaniment of the murmuring pines, and the slumberous sighing of the tide under the cliff.

Over the belt of blackness which stretched between grassland and sky, the gleaming stars were pricking their way one by one into sight. On the western face of the house the firmament was still luminous, and here the evening star was the only one that had as yet conquered the dying daylight.

Mary was singing softly to herself at the piano, just inside the open windows. Her voice, low, but full and sweet exceedingly because of its heart's music, reached the two men round the other side of the house.

'Come,' said the old man, breaking with a visible relief the silence that had fallen between them, 'let us go to Mary. She will drive away our touch of gloom.'

John rose willingly. They were never so happy as when together, those three.

THE END.

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